UNDER THE STREET LAMP

JONATHAN HAWKE

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UNDER THE STREET LAMP

VIGNETTES OF AUSTRALIAN BUSH LIFE

BY

JONATHAN HAWKE

WITH INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY

HENRY HOWARD

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To

THE RT. HON. SIR SAMUEL J. WAY, Bt., P.C.,

LL.D. CANT., D.C.L. OXON.,

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR AND CHIEF JUSTICE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA,

THE FRIEND AND HELPER OF EVERY WORTHY INSTITUTION, AND ONE OF THE TRUEST FRIENDS OF THE TOILERS IN THE 'REGIONS BEYOND,'

THE AUTHOR DEDICATES,

WITH GRATEFUL AND RESPECTFUL AFFECTION, THESE VIGNETTES OF AUSTRALIAN BUSH LIFE.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The writer of these sketches is a typical Australian —frank, fearless, and open-eyed. He is a Methodist minister, who has mixed much with men of every type, and knows their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, the problems that vex their spirits and the doubts that perplex their minds. He possesses the precious if perilous gift of humour, and has here translated truth into the terms of the mining camp and the back-block selection. It is this power of adaptation in Methodism which has enabled it, in the Colonies, to keep in touch with the pioneers of civilization who swing the axe in lonely forest lands, or wield the prospectors' pick in search of the welcome lode.

As these sketches portray real characters, and present phases of country life in a land of vast distances, ample spaces, new institutions, and

unconventional customs, their 'free-and-easy' modes of expression had to be retained. Without this raciness and redolence they could not have faithfully depicted the typical Australian bushman.

HENRY HOWARD.

ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Much of the literature dealing with Australian bush life has represented, and for the most part, faithfully, the rougher, and it may be said the coarser and lower, elements in the character of the back-blocks worker. But every one who knows the true Australian bushman knows that he has another side. Against the almost universal indulgence in drink, gambling, profanity, and general rowdyism, must be placed many noble characteristics.

Intensely loyal to his mates, generous to his enemies, tender-hearted as a woman to those in suffering or need, prepared to share his last bit of 'damper' or, more precious still, his last pint of water, with any needy stranger he may meet, the rough and reckless bushman is often to be classed as Nature's nobleman by those who believe that

Kind hearts are more than coronets.

Furthermore, long experience has proved to the writer that the bushman has a capacity for religion, and a responsiveness to its claims, unsuspected by the superficial observer, who sees in him only a shocking example of vulgarity and vice.

This better aspect of Australian bush character has not been very fully or sympathetically dealt with by those who have written on Australian life and manners. It is this which the present writer has here endeavoured to depict.

This book is not a novel, for it contains nothing that can be called a plot; it is not history nor biography. It is just a series of glimpses of incidents and persons in real life, and typical of a large and deeply interesting class.

Of course, some liberties have been taken with names, places, and incidents, so as to sufficiently veil the identity of persons still living; but this, it is hoped, does not mar the faithfulness of the portraiture.

ADELAIDE, S.A.,

April, 1910.

CONTENTS

PAGE

UNDER THE STREET LAMP—

Introductions—The Club's Chief Member . 11
Old Ruggy on Political Economy . . 18
The Larrikin 22
Old Ruggy's Story 32
Big Jim's Recovery 42
A Bush Communion and its Prelude . 49
Old Ruggy's Trip up North . . . 57
Raven's Story 68
A Shearer's Sunday 74
A Church Investment 80
The Wombat Creek Sunday School . . 86
Temperance Sunday 93
Botany Bill 98
Christmas and the Poor 106
Old Ruggy's Convert 115
Old Ruggy's Failure 122
The Tragedy of Botany Bill . . . 128
The Story 136

MEMOIRS OF PARRA BURRA—

His First Station 149
The Prophet's Chamber 154
Old Bones 161
'Vengeance is Mine'. 169
James McDermott 176
A Startling Revolt 182
James McDermott's Home-coming . . 189

PAGE

CHILDREN OF NATURE—

From the Back-Blocks 203
Virgin Soil 214
The Rented Pew 226
More Disappointments 235
'A Little Child shall Lead Them' . 243
The Argument from Experience . . 253
Daybreak 263

THREE CHRISTMAS GIFTS—

The Waif 269
The Fire Fiend 288
'Although . . . Yet' 300
Sunshine at Last 310

UNDER THE STREET LAMP

Being Transactions of the Street-Lamp Club

as reported by Jonathan Hawke

INTRODUCTIONS—THE CLUB'S CHIEF MEMBER

THE most important member of our club, indeed one might say the only permanent member, is the street lamp itself. It stands at an obscure corner of a narrow street that would be very gloomy but for its genial rays. There it stands, with the window of old Cephas Merritt's cottage solemnly blinking at it.

As a member of the club the lamp is always perfectly upright—a picture of stern, if somewhat cold, integrity, unswayed by the stormy eloquence of Dick Raven the Socialist, the soft-hearted defence of worthless reprobates that represents the prime defect of good old Cephas Merritt's character, and without a tremor when 'Ruggy' the bushman breaks up all the foundations of good, sober King's English with a torrent of back-station slang, to the horror of staid people who know that 'Old Ruggy' is a member of the Demas Street Methodist Church and belongs to Cephas Merritt's class.

The way the lamp sheds light on all the subjects that come before our club—from the price of raw hides to the latest Chicago University theory of

Biogenesis—might well turn the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* or even the most juvenile debating society, green with envy. It is true that, due to a crack in the glass, only very imperfectly repaired with a piece of putty, stormy gusts sometimes make the devoted Welsbach flicker ominously; but that is only to remind its brother members that boisterousness and passion always tend to obscure, rather than illuminate or enforce the truth.

The cosmopolitan character of the lamp always reproaches and sometimes irritates me. It seems to be totally oblivious of those salutary social distinctions, without which, as I think, society and the Church could hardly exist; and which I have delighted to expound in my favourite sermon, 'The Sheep and the Goats,' in the lesser chapels of the Demas Street Circuit. I have seen that lamp shedding the same light on the gold repeater of a millionaire pork butcher, waiting for his car at the corner, and on a penny that old widow Grey was taking to buy her supper with, but which she put into the hand of a little tattered child, a trifle hungrier and colder than herself. And somehow I thought at the time—though now I know it was only sentimental weakness—that the lamp shone brighter on the tear she dropped on the penny than on the diamonds that encrusted the repeater.

Old Brother Merritt says the best thing he sees about the lamp is that its light always seems kinder

and more helpful in times of darkness and storm. He watches people picking their way through the mire on a wild night, and hurrying to the shelter of home, guided by its rays, and he has just taken the lamp right into his class-meeting, and made it speak as he never could. But that's just like Cephas Merritt. He has no proper pride, and just spiritualizes everything, and has sympathy with everybody. I shouldn't wonder if he got up a special evangelistic mission to convert Tartarus some day.

Now, I've filled up all this space with that exasperating old lamp, and hardly said a word about the club I was to introduce.

I will only add that I am Jonathan Hawke, a local preacher and junior society steward in the Demas Street Circuit, and a member of Mr. Merritt's class.

I cannot just say how the Street-Lamp Club came into being. There was no committee appointed, no formal motion for the inauguration of such a society, no rules or standing orders. Yet almost every week, weather permitting, we found ourselves, as by mutual consent, reviewing some phases of human life and experience under the genial rays of the old lamp.

In trying to keep a kind of journal of the club's proceedings, I disclaim any responsibility for the utterances of some of its members—more especially

the dangerous views of Dick Raven and the undignified language of Old Ruggy.

. . . . . .

I read my introductory notes to the club when we assembled this week. But I don't think I will submit any of these in future to its members; it is too much like casting pearls before swine. Anyway, I shall not read them when Raven is there.

He says I began at the wrong end, like the sermon I preached on the solitary occasion when Dick, having strayed into the Lazarus Street Mission Hall, where I was 'planned,' heard me preach. But that's Dick cynical jibe, because I don't endorse his dangerous theories.

I don't quite know how Dick came to be a member of the club at all. He just happens along almost every evening, and seems by tacit consent to make himself one of the little group under the lamp. Or, if the night is cold and we take shelter behind Cephas Merritt's little window, in some unexplained way Dick Raven is sure to be there.

Dick isn't a Christian. He never says he isn't, but he never attends 'class,' seldom goes to church, and always pretends to laugh at me when I undertake to show the monstrous ignorance and impiety of the higher critics.

Yet there are some strange contradictions in Dick Raven. Old Ruggy told me that once when he went to the hospital to see an old mate from

Cooper's Creek, who was dying of asthma, there was Raven reading the Bible to him and talking to him about Jesus 'like I'd never heard any parson talk yet,' Old Ruggy said.

'I tell you, Mr. Hawke' (Ruggy used to call me 'mate' till I told him it wasn't a proper style of address for a local preacher and society steward), 'I tell you, Dick's a white man—solid timber right through, and no shakes or gum veins or dry rot.

'Let me just give you one case. He found out that poor old Scotty had a wife and five young 'uns back there in the shepherd's hut on the Barrawirra station. All their chink had melted away while Scotty lay there spittin' his lungs up; and after they packed him off to the hospital she'd crippled her leg somehow, and they'd lived on rabbits and flour ever since. Then Dick Raven got wind of it, and wired off money, and shook up them station blokes and the bosses, and they got Scotty's wife and little 'uns fixed up as snug as a cartridge. I tell you, if Dick don't go to heaven, I don't know who will.'

I tried to point out to Old Ruggy that it was false doctrine to hold that mere good works in an unregenerate man could have any merit or be pleasing in God's sight. I quoted *Field's Handbook* to prove that acts such as he described might spring from mere pride, love of approbation, or some other

unworthy motive, and so only add to the sinner's condemnation, for—

> Doing is a deadly thing;
> Doing ends in death.

But Ruggy is only a rough old bushman, sadly ignorant of theology, and I feared to press the matter too far in his present excited condition, for under certain circumstances (as isn't it Shakespeare says?), his language 'is frequent and painful and free.'

In addition to Father Merritt, Ruggy, Raven, and myself, there are other members of the club of a more intermittent sort. Some members of Bro. Merritt's class, which includes the extremes of the Demas Street congregation—some of the richest and poorest, the most cultured and most ignorant—(for they all love the queer old man), an undergraduate or two, some old bush friends of Ruggy's, a couple of youths from a neighbouring training-stable with wizened faces, slouch hats, and velvet collars—these all from time to time find their way into our circle and join in discussing the great questions of the day.

But why am I there? That question I've never quite been able to answer. I must say that sometimes when I have considered my position in the church I have felt compromised. One day I told Bro. Merritt that I was holding on in hope of doing some good to darkened souls, like Raven. He

laughed and said he doubted not the spiritual benefit would be mutual! I cannot understand Cephas Merritt; he is one of the saintliest men I ever knew, but he seems incapable of appreciating great theological principles and seems to think goodness is everything. He shows the greatest consideration for Dick Raven, and yet I've never heard him say a word to Dick about his soul.

I believe I shall feel it my duty to call attention, kindly and in a spirit of meekness, to this grave omission, when the leaders' meeting is held. I think a brother of Cephas Merritt's status should be instant in season and out of season to reprove and rebuke the unconverted.

OLD RUGGY ON POLITICAL ECONOMY

WE had a somewhat heated discussion at our last meeting on the subject of the approaching Parliamentary elections.

Being a strong Conservative in politics I naturally spoke emphatically in favour of the candidate whose views coincided with my own. I found Dick Raven was entirely on the opposite side. This was to be expected, for, as I told you, Dick holds extreme and dangerous views. The other members of the club seemed pretty evenly divided in their opinions; but apart from an occasional interjection left most of the discussion to Raven and myself.

I had just shown conclusively that the stability of the whole fabric of Church and State depended on maintaining those principles for which my candidate stood, and was expecting the endorsement of the whole company save perhaps Raven himself, when Old Ruggy broke out with a vehemence extraordinary even for him.

'I tell you, mates—I tell you, though I ain't no politician—I see where we go wrong. We put in a

feller what's a fool, 'cause he's got money, and another what's a rogue, 'cause he can talk, and another 'cause he wants a billet, and another 'cause he promises to get us a billet, and another 'cause he ain't nothing in partic'ler, only he belongs to our party. When I think of it, I want Bullocky Bill from Barooka Station to help me say a say on it. Why don't we people that claim to do what the Carpenter of Nazareth wants us to do, try to put in men for the good they'll do?

'Some have been tryin' for years to check the Drink Devil, that tears out the poor bushman's soul and makes him worse than a beast. I tell you, mates, when drink's done its worst it leaves the thing that was a man one time, worse than the festering carcass what turns a half-bred, starvin' dingo sick.

'Then some have been tryin' to keep a Sunday for us poor chaps, and to keep poor girls and women out of the grip of sweaters and bloodsuckers and sich. Yet we go and make all the fuss as to whether we shall pay our taxes out of the left pocket or the right, or whether some clever scamp can't get us outer payin' at all. We think more about taxation than about the bodies and souls of men. Let us in churches say we'll put in the man that has promised God A'mighty to do right, and he'll get the taxation racket fair and square somehow.'

I tried to make Ruggy see that Ethics is one thing and Political Economy is another; but it wasn't any use. He is dreadfully ignorant.

'But you don't see, Ruggy,' I argued 'that if you never thought of anything but goodness, the party, that is, the group of members that are sound on the great principles of political science, would fall to pieces. We must have a government and an opposition if things are to be carried on decently and in order. It's the accepted theory of responsible government the world over.'

Old Ruggy had got over his temper and only laughed.

'Look here, Mister Hawke, back in the old days, I used to work on the copper shows up Blinman way. Old Billy Topp used to keep a lot of jackasses—donkeys, you know—and breed mules. Rum old chap was Billy—nearly as orkard as them mules of his. Billy used to cart copper ore down in the slack season to Pt. Augusta with them there mule teams of his. Well, one day I met Billy going up a big hill near the old Parachilna station with his team—leastways he was trying his hardest to git up. He'd got four mules in his team, and two jackasses hooked on behind his empty dray. Well, them donkeys jist stuck out thur feet and sot down at it and pulled back for all they was worth; and every bit of a rough place the old dray would stop dead and the mules couldn't budge it an inch.

Then Old Billy Topp would wallop the mules; then he'd go back and wallop them jackasses, and the consarn would creep on a few yards further and then stop agen.

'Then I catches up and I says "Why, Billy, wot's up? Why don't you put the donkeys in front and make 'em pull?"'

And he says, 'A mighty lot you know about drivin' donkeys. Mules and asses won't work together.'

'Well,' I ses, 'let's have a try, you can't do no wuss than you are doin' anyhow. And we hitches the donkeys in front. Then I lays on a good cowhide, and knocks half the cussidness outer them mules, and a fresh ration of sense into them asses, and the dray went up the hill beautiful. Now, your party gover'ment, Mister Hawke, is a sight like Billy Topp's team—mules and donkeys pullin' opposite ways. Get 'em to pull together; and if yer can't find nothin' but a donkey to put in the lead it'll be better'n nothing.'

THE LARRIKIN

I HAD been reading *McClure's*, and studying the article on Dr. Loeb's theory of the chemical origin of life. That mystery of mysteries was to be solved—or dissolved—by a pinch of salt! A theory to be taken, as our superintendent said on Sunday morning, *cum grano salis*. Well, those club members never seemed quite prepared to admit my superior attainments in theology and philosophy. I've seen Dick Raven actually grin when I have excused their ignorance of some of these things; and quiet old Cephas Merritt would have that exasperating twinkle in his left eye, though he wouldn't say much. With all his piety old Merritt can be very witty at times—though his wit isn't always opportune. But I determined to knock those sceptics speechless with a statement and criticism of Dr. Loeb's theory. I had specially looked up the encyclopaedia on the Origin of Life for the occasion, and I had biogenesis, protoplasm, ions, electrical metamorphosis, Helmholtz and Huxley at my finger-ends. Then Dick Raven spoiled it all.

Just as we gathered under the lamp and had exchanged greetings, a youth of about nineteen slouched past. He wore a hat with a rim flopped down far on the back of his head, hair fringed on a narrow forehead, a thin, hatchet face, receding chin; long arms, and a pinched-up chest. His coat was short, with velvet collar and pocket flaps, a flaring red tie, and no waistcoat, very wide bell-bottomed trousers over little shoes with lace-holes down to the toes, and extra high heels badly gone to one side. He was whistling a bar of 'Clementine' through his teeth, but made a quaver rest as he passed, to squirt a little tobacco-juice at the lamp-post.

'There,' said Raven, 'that's a product of our modern civilization,' and I knew by the tone of him that he was in for some of his socialistic racket, and my chance of getting in on the 'Origin of Life' was seriously endangered.

'There,' continued Dick, 'is one of the worst samples of waste material—a larrikin. I tell you there's no redemption for that class of man—but no, it isn't a man—you couldn't get a "color" of manhood out of ten ton of such raddle if you put it through a 10-head battery and boiled the tailings in cyanide. And he isn't a boy. He's too old, and cunning, and filthy; seen too much of what he calls "life" ever to be classed with boys.

'A boy is one of God's choicest things on earth, a larrikin is one of the devil's worst. And how does it come about? You hustle men off the land, you crowd them into cities, they live in back lanes that stink and stifle; that's where the vermin spawn that you try to keep from biting you with your stockades, and reformatories, and prison-hulks, and cat-o'-nine-tails. I tell you, a heap of garbage that will poison a city will fertilize broad acres and make 'em bloom like a rose. Get crowds of half-starved labourers out of the slums into the pure air of the back-block farm or the cattle station, and instead of breeding them wizened, foul-mouthed libels on humanity, you'll get them bonny, clean-limbed, strapping chaps like we sent too many of to South Africa a few years ago.'

'But ain't you a bit too hard on them young chaps, Dick?' said old Ruggy, quietly (Ruggy always has a soft spot in his heart for the 'young 'uns,' as he calls them). 'Ain't a good bit of it only fun and mischief, what they'll get over in a while—'specially, Dick, if we help 'em a bit, you know? Yer can't do no good with chaps by jest chucking hard names at 'em; leastways, that's what I've found. Couldn't we help by trying to get the drink out of their way? You know what I feel about whisky. Ain't that at the bottom of a lot of it?'

Dick had blown off his steam and settled down for an argument. 'But,' he said, 'drink isn't the special failing of your average larrikin. He drinks, but drunkenness isn't his characteristic. It's profanity, and vice, and rowdyism of the flashy kind, and by-and-by, perhaps, crimes of violence that get him jugged.'

'Look here,' I said, 'you fellows all miss the point.' I felt disappointed over the failure to get in that carefully arranged talk about biogenesis; but I determined to improve the occasion by dealing with the burning question of religious instruction in the State schools. 'What do you expect from the youth of our land when we take them in hand for six or seven years of their life, absorb all their time, profess to educate them—for even those larrikins have twice the book-learning that their fathers had—and keep away from them the one Book that would make all the difference? It's shutting the Bible out of our schools that makes the larrikin, and not the things Raven rants about.'

At this point Mr. Smith, over the way, who sometimes saunters over when he thinks the debate is getting warm, interposed.

'But, Mr. Hawke, if your view is correct, how is it that Sydney, where the Bible has never been excluded, indeed, where it is taught under precisely the same conditions as geography or grammar, has the worst reputation for larrikinism of any place

in Australia? Certainly, the Bible in schools hasn't made them worse, but why hasn't it made them better? You know, I am not a religious man myself; and, perhaps I oughtn't to advise, but couldn't you religious people do more to teach the Bible, when you believe, as we all believe, that its moral influence is so great? You say the State takes up all the boy's time; but there are one hundred and twelve waking hours in every week, and the State only asks for twenty-five; couldn't you make better use of all the machinery of your Churches for some part of the other eighty-seven hours?'

I felt a bit stumped just for a moment, and was rather relieved when Father Merritt broke in.

'I think, friends,' he said, 'we won't get much further ahead by trying to put blame here or there for things as they are. Perhaps there is some truth in the view each of you takes; but can we do something to remedy the evils we see? It seems to me there are two kinds of larrikin—one, the frolicsome, mischief-loving young scamp, who doesn't mean any harm, but just does things for fun; the sort that, perhaps, a little more parental control would have checked, and perhaps a little wise, gentle handling now will cure; the other, the criminal kind, either a criminal already or preparing to become one.'

'Well, what would you do with them, Mr. Merritt?' asked Ruggy, quite earnestly.

'Oh, I'm no authority,' old Cephas replied, 'but it seems to me the first sort need to grow self-respect and get an aim in life. And they won't get that while we stand back and throw bricks at them, leaving them to herd with others like themselves and worse. Can't we, who are trying to do Christ's work, get nearer to them, show some sympathetic interest in their lives, let them see we respect them and expect them to respect themselves? We can do a little more to support the work of Boys' Brigades, Boys' Institutes, and Clubs, where these young chaps will come under the influence of those who are able and willing to help them, and at the same time get interested in those manly exercises which appeal to every healthy boy, and which will help to cultivate obedience, self-respect, and physical fitness; and' —the old man's eyes shone—'we can talk to Him about them.'

'And what about the criminal larrikin?'

'Suppose,' old Cephas said, 'that instead of sending the young offender to jail to be confirmed in villany by thieves and burglars, we gave them the opportunity of compulsory military drill every night for six or twelve months? It would help to make men of them, and that's a good start towards making a Christian.'

Old Merritt's confidence in the salvability of every human soul is so serene and unwavering that

I shrink from disturbing it by explaining to him the scientific principles of criminology.

. . . . . .

After our discussion on the larrikin question various things prevented our club from meeting for some weeks. Mr. Merritt's suggestion that criminal larrikinism might be cured by compulsory military service instead of imprisonment had astonished me. That old Merritt, the saintly class-leader, should advocate anything that favoured militarism seemed to me like another fall of man, and I was anxious for an opportunity of sweeping away his delusion. But I have never been so elbowed out of a discussion before. When we met I had no sooner opened the question than the others swarmed in and fairly crowded me out. They were deeply interested in the old man's suggestions, and drew him quite out of his usual modesty to talk freely, almost excitedly, about it. Dick Raven was sceptical. He views larrikins as vermin, incapable of improvement.

'I think, Mr. Merritt,' he said, 'twenty-five with the "cat" once a month would be better for the young brutes that insult women and go in gangs and throttle men in back lanes than all your soldiering.'

'No, Dick, the only real cure is to make men of them. They are not men. They have grown in body, but not in mind and character; and you

can't make a man out of a hoodlum by beating him with a "cat." You will only blot out any speck of manhood he might have. What go to make up manhood are such things as self-respect, ambition, obedience to proper authority, willingness for honest work, and so on. So when these young scamps once come into the grip of the law I would give them the choice instead of going to jail for, say, six months to get their criminal education finished, to go to drill from eight o'clock to ten every week-day for twelve months. I don't know much about psychology—it's Mr. Hawke here who can talk learnedly about that—but I know a little about human nature, and I think there's something about the mind that if it spends part of its energy in say, eight hours' daily work, and the rest of its energy in study and drill under conditions of absolute obedience and discipline, there won't be much taste for street rowdyism left.'

I was just going to ask old Cephas whether a compulsory night school and Bible-class, with perhaps a half-hour in the gymnasium, wouldn't be better, when Old Ruggy broke in. Old Ruggy isn't rude, but he has never shown the respect for a senior officer of the Church that I think he might.

'Now, look here, Mr. Merritt; I'm a bit shook on this sojerin' idea of yours, I'll own up. It looks a bit like fighting Satan with weapons out of his own armoury, like I heard one of the preachers

say. I think the devil invented sojering, but if you can improve on his patent and make it a track along which these poor chaps may find something better than smut and blasphemy, with the stone jug at the other end, why, I'm with you. There, mates, that's my deal.'

'But, whoy, Misther Mirritt' (it was the red-headed policeman on the beat who spoke; he is a sort of intermittent member of the club), 'But, whoy wad ye lave thim larrikins till they got lagged entirely before ye did nothing wid thim? Isn't it bist to kill the 'agle whin it's only an egg? Why not begin wid the bhoys somehow, and cure the disease before it starts?'

'Well,' said the old man, 'there's a good deal in that; and we are trying to do something for the boys. Something more must be done, and we want to think it out. But the boy problem is a bit different, I think, from this. Truant schools, and truant inspectors, reformatories and boys' brigades, and other things will have to be used. But that isn't just the thing we're talking about now. It's the case of these chaps that are more like lawless, untrained animals than vicious criminals that I feel most anxious about; and I hope when we put Mr. Raven here, the social reformer, into Parliament, this is one of the things he will try to deal with.'

Here was Mr. Merritt, the senior class-leader in the Demas Street Church, discussing a great moral question for a whole evening, and had never said a word about Bible-reading or the necessity of conversion. I didn't know what to think, and I felt lonely and irritated, and the street lamp seemed to wink at me as if enjoying my discomfiture, so I said an abrupt good-bye to the club and went home.

OLD RUGGY'S STORY

'WELL, Ruggy, I think you push this Home Mission claim altogether too strongly. Of course it's all right, but charity begins at home, and I've got to look after the Circuit Funds. We can't do everything; and, besides, I'm not quite sure that the game is worth the candle. I don't see much result for all the money we send to the back-blocks.'

I was the speaker, and the conversation grew out of the missionary meeting we had had at Demas Street the previous evening. I had just been elected junior circuit steward, and felt called upon to watch closely anything that threatened to affect the ordinary revenue of the circuit. It was known to some of us that old Ruggy was one of the largest contributors to the Home Mission Fund, though he was only a working man; and he had a way of putting the claims of that department that made one feel positively uncomfortable.

'Do you really think those bush parsons do much good, Ruggy?' said Dick Raven.

Dick was leaning his back against the lamp-post, and puffing little rings of smoke at the moon,

watching them writhe and curl and disappear. He rather liked setting Ruggy off on a bush yarn.

'Look here, do you care for me to tell you summat about it, or is it wasting the time of the club for an old buffer like me to get talking about them old days?'

'Oh, fire away, Ruggy,' said Dick.

'Well, you remember when the Transcontinental was being made. The times were hard, and I went up with a stone-scraping gang above Hergott. They were a rough lot, and Big Jim—he was my mate—was about the roughest of 'em. Not a bad chap when sober, was Jim, but very irritable and onreasonable, always ready to fight, and with an awful tongue. I was pretty bad myself them days, I'm ashamed to say, and Jim and me got pretty thick. I'd try to keep him out of trouble when he got to the shanty and got drunk; and was hard set to keep out of reach of his long arms and terrible fists myself.

'One day the shanty cart came along the line with a keg of whisky. It wasn't much among so many, but it was enough to make some of the chaps funny and some quarrelsome, and all of them ready for any devilment they could find. You can't think how men get to want something to break the awful sameness of the endless desert plains. He feels he must drink or fight, or something, just for a change. Well, that evening a

young chap came along on an old horse that looked like a skin stretched over a hen-coop—a pale-faced, frightened-lookin' little chap. As soon as Jim saw him he roared out with his big voice, 'Look at this! Say mister, why don't you git inside?'

'It was awful unlucky the young missionary chap happened along that partic'ler day. You see, they were a rough lot, but they wouldn't be unkind, intentional like, to any stranger if they hadn't drink in 'em. When they got whisky their temper was very queer and uncertain.

'The young chap rode right up and spoke very civil like, and said he was a home missionary and wanted to have a service at the camp that evening.

'Jim just growled, 'Do what you like,' then roared out, savage-like, 'You blokes git on with yer work.' Jim was ganger, and no man wanted to say anything when he was ruffled.

'The parson chap rode along the line and spoke to one or two small gangs, and about dusk sure enough he turned up at the big camp for the service. The whisky had got a bit "dead" in Big Jim by this, and he was in an ugly temper, and some of the others seemed a bit nasty.

'In those days I didn't believe in anything. I'd read some lectures by Ingersoll, and thought religion was about dead and forgotten. I'd had very little whisky, but was ready for any fun that might turn up.

'The little parson chap looked paler and more frightened than ever as he stood up on some sleepers so that he might be high enough to look at the men. He took out a little Bible and said, "Boys, shall I read a bit from the Old Book?" and he read on till he came to "the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

'Just then Big Jim came out of the cook's tent. I had wondered what had become of Jim, and thought most likely he was up to mischief; and now he came out, dragging the Chinaman cook by the pig-tail, squealing piteously, right up to the little preacher.

'With a string of awful profanity, Big Jim yelled, "Now, parson, no man can come to this camp that won't fight. This Chinkey's the only fair deal for you, and yer don't wag no gospel chin-music till yer fight the Chow."

'In vain the preacher stammered remonstrances.

'I got to feel a bit serious. Jim had stupidly blundered into making a kind of hard-and-fast bargain of it, and he had a way of doggedly keeping his word, especially when he had a little drink in.

'The little preacher stood quite still and quiet. His lip quivered a little, and a look came into his eyes that I shan't forget for a bit. It was a look like a poor wounded euro will turn on you out of its great soft eyes, all pleading like, when you've just going to give it the last hit.

'I sang out, "Leave the parson alone, Jim, can't yer? don't be a fool; he ain't doing yer no harm." I oughtn't to have said it. Jim's evil temper was up in a moment. "Yer want to take the parson's part agin me, do yer? Well, jist wait there a minute for me. This fer yer parson," and he squirted tobacco-juice right in his face; and picking up the Chinaman bodily he hurled him at the preacher, and the two fell in a heap over the sleepers. The lad slowly picked himself up. There was a deep cut on his cheek-bone, and his right wrist was broken. Some of the boys got him away, and Jim, growling and swearing, went to his tent.

. . . . . .

'Three months later Jim and me had left the railway, and were working a copper show twenty miles from Mr. Abbot's head quarters—for I'd found out that that was the little preacher chap's name. Jim never said nothing about the scene at the camp, and I didn't press him. One day he didn't seem well, so next day I got him to stay at camp and do some cooking and clean-up while I went to work alone. I got a bit uneasy about the middle of the day and went back to camp. When I got near I saw nothing had been done, and when I got into the hut there was Jim tossing about and talking the blessedest rot you ever heard. He'd kept going as long as he could, and then went down all at wonst with that awful typhoid. I

warn't no good for a nuss, but I did what I could, and he raved and kicked all night and near all next day.

'Then, all at wonst, he got quiet, an' he ses, "Ruggy, old man, I'm done for, clean euchred; stonebroke on me own deal. Ruggy, could yer fetch the parson, old man?"

'I tried to persuade him that he was all right, and the parson wouldn't do him no good. He begged and prayed me to go; then he swore at me awful, and I felt better, because I thought he must be getting all right. Then he went off his nut again and raved all night. When he come to again he put in the old cry for the preacher, and I made up my mind to go. I fixed him up with Mick, our other mate, to look after him, and rode off on Nigger late in the afternoon. It was a rough, dangerous track across the Razorback, and a storm was rising in the nor'-east. Nigger was a hard-mouthed, vicious brute, but sure-footed as a cat, and a bit under two hours brought me to the little hut that served Mr. Abbot for bedroom, study, and parlour. I didn't waste any time.

'"See, mister," I said, "You know Big Jim, he's my mate; him that chucked the Chinaman at yer that day at the eighty-mile, and broke yer wrist. Well, Jim's bin and got busted somehow, and he wants some one who knows the game to see him safe through. Now, he served you a dirty trick, all

right; but are you on to turn down the pack and start this deal with him fair?"

'He stared at me and said, "I—that is—well, my friend, I don't quite know what you mean."

'"Well, mister, Jim's broke—dying, you understand, and he wants some one to help. Don't think yer much at the game, but there ain't no one else. Will yer git on Nigger, there, and go?"

'He shook all over and turned pale to the very lips, and I looked at the thin, white face and the thin, white hands, and I thought of that brute Nigger and the track over the Razorback, and it was already dark as the grave, and the storm howling like a host of demons.

'"You're afraid?" I asked.

'"Yes, horribly afraid," he said, and his teeth chattered.

'"All right, old man. I'll cry off; it is a bit tall to ask you to do it; and it ain't no good, anyway."

'I was off; but he called out, "What do you mean? I'm going, of course, I'm going. What do you take me for? I'm afraid—what's the good of denying it—and I'm not much of a rider; but if God wants me to see your poor dying mate I'll get there all right. How am I to go?"

'"Oh, you jist hang on to Nigger. Mind, he shies frightful. But you jist hang on and let him rip, and he will take you to the camp."

'I got him on somehow—Nigger snorting and edging round pretty bad. Then off in the blackness like a rifle-shot. Then I had time to think. Bushman as I was, I knew I could never find the track over the Razorback in that storm and blinding rain, and I had nothing I could do but wait till next morning. I thought about that slip of a lad with the pale face on the back of that vicious, half-broken Blanchewater, flying over fallen timber, and rocky ridges, and treacherous gulches in the pitchy darkness. Then I fair cussed myself for letting him go.

'Next, the thought came to me, "Did ever you see any man as brave before?" His words, "I'm horribly afraid, but I must go. What do you take me for?" kept ringing in my ears. Then another sentence in the same voice, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

'What if it was true, and this pale lad knew it was true, and that was why he went out into the howling storm to try to help his enemy? But no. It was all a sham, and parsons a canting, money-hunting crew. But still I cursed myself for letting the lad go, and longed for a streak of daylight to get back and see how it all panned out.

'It was late next morning when I reached camp. As I pushed through the scrub on the bridle path for the last mile my legs shook, and a horrible fear came over me. What if that brute Nigger had

broke the lad's neck on that wild night ride? I thought a mighty lot of Jim, but if I'd found the little preacher's body dead, and Jim well and strong as ever, I believe I'd never have forgiven Jim for being alive.

'And what did I find? There was Big Jim tucked up in his bunk, sleeping like a babby, and the little parson making that big, soft-hearted, blockhead Mick straighten up things since their last round. After a bit I got to know all about it. He owned up he never quite knew what happened after he left his own shanty. He couldn't sit Nigger, so he got down on him and got his arms round the Blanchewater's neck, and the savage brute tore on through the darkness, thinking Old Nick was on him, and that was all the little parson knew till he got to the camp. He found big Jim raving mad, and Mick trying to hold him in bed. He quieted him somehow, and then made Mick go to the claim in the storm and dark, and lug up the big puddlin'-trough, and fill it with cold water, and they stripped Jim and soused him in. And every time the fever went up they put him in again. And, now, there was my mate, looking a bit scrawny about the jaws, but sleeping.

'Well, mates, I couldn't help it. I jist picked up the little chap and ran five times round the room with him, then I dropped down, and cried like a bloomin' booby. And Mick—he's a Catholic

he is, Mick—blowed his nose and he sez, "Why don't yer put an oilcan on this chimbly, Ruggy? it smokes horribly."

'Well, Big Jim never put in his checks after all. The little parson pulled him through. I've got to think different about parsons and the Bible since then, and so has Jim. I ain't half the kind of Christian I orter be, but Jim's a white man—clean grit right through. And it's all along of that pale-faced boy with the frightened eyes.'

BIG JIM'S RECOVERY

AFTER old Ruggy had told us his long story of the little home missionary and his wild ride over the Razorback, through the storm and darkness to see the fever-smitten man who had persecuted him, we somehow didn't seem to care about talking any more that evening. I looked round on the group under the lamp. But Dick Raven's face was turned away; big Constable O'Phelan was standing very erect and looking very fierce, but there was a suspicious quiver about his great square chin. Old Cephas Merritt's face was a study. He didn't seem to see any of us, but to be looking away to another world, and his eyes shone like stars. He murmured to himself, 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them,' and it seemed somehow like a benediction, and we all slipped off and went home.

All the week I found myself going over and over the story of the pale-faced missionary—even to the rough bush slang that seemed so innocent and

natural to Old Ruggy, but which I told myself was altogether improper, especially in a local preacher and junior circuit steward like myself. Though I didn't like the idea of compromising myself by asking Old Ruggy to resume his story, and tell us really how Big Jim was converted, I felt a strong desire to know, and secretly wished that something might set the old man going again along that line. I had not long to wait.

We had hardly exchanged greetings next week, when Mr. Merritt said, 'Ruggy, I've been thinking all the week about that noble-hearted young man—a man brave enough to do his duty in spite of mortal fear—and you said your mate, Big Jim, became a good Christian. How did it come about?'

We had gathered in Mr. Merritt's warm kitchen, and Old Ruggy settled himself comfortably in a big chair, stuffed a stumpy finger into the bowl of his pipe, satisfied himself that it was in good working order by a few vigorous puffs, and then, using his pipe for purposes of punctuation and emphasis, resumed his yarn.

'Well, though the worst of the fever seemed over after the little parson's cold-water cure during that wild night, Jim was a long way from being fair on his pins. Mr Abbot stayed at our camp two days, watched over Big Jim, and nursed him like a babby, put up with all his kickin' and cursin', taught Mick how to make spoon tack out of tinned

milk and sago and stuff, and made the big Irishman chief nuss and general household boss of the camp.

'"Now, Mick, remember Jim's to have no solid food for a week, and very little then, or he'll slip through our fingers after all."

'"Begorra, an' it's the divil a bit will he git, if Father Peter himself ordered it," says Mick. He had become the devoted slave of the pale-faced parson lad, declared there wasn't a man in the north fit to wipe his shoes, and was ready with much joy and more profanity to punch the head of anybody that said anything agin it.

'We had an awful time with Jim while he was getting better. You might as well try and keep in bed a half-broken steer. He swore we were starving him, and that if he didn't get meat he'd hammer us to a jelly. But all his great strength was gone, and Mick would just sit on his legs till he was exhausted and would go to sleep. But some days we could do nothing with him.

'Then I'd say to Mick, "Go and git Nigger; I'll have to ride over and tell the parson what an ungrateful, unreasonable old fool Jim is."

'Then he'd say, "Don't go and blab to him. I'll try to be quiet somehow."

'Well, after Jim got all right, we went to work in the little railway township, where Mr. Abbot lived, and Jim took to go to church. But he warn't no better for it. He took to drink rather more, wasn't

so light-hearted and jolly as he used to be, got surly and snappy without no reason as I could see, and his language was wuss than ever.

'But if ever he got drunk at the shanty, or got trying to git up a quarrel with his mates, if any one said promiscus-like, "I seen Mr. Abbot passing Fagin's just now," or something like that, Jim 'ud shet up and go quietly away to his hut without a word. I believe he'd almost have died for the little parson, but it seemed as if nothing would win him from drink and fighting and bad language. I used to go to church with Jim sometimes; not that I believed in religion a bit more than I used, but I liked the little parson, and knew that he believed it all right, and tried to live it out by helping us bush chaps every way he could.

'Well, one Sunday night the little parson preached, and Jim seemed awful shook up. The sermon wasn't much, as far as I could see—he never could preach much, and that night it was a bit poorer than ever; but Jim, he jist hung on to the back of a seat with his great bony hands and trembled all over.

'I got to feel pretty bad about Jim, and whispered near the end of the sermon, "I say, Jim, what's up? You ain't well. Come to Fagin's and git a drop of whisky."

'But he only growled, 'Shut up, can't yer," and kept his eyes fixed on the preacher. Then

there was a prayer-meeting. I wasn't used to that kind of thing, but I saw Jim meant to stay, so I thought I'd see it through.

'The first man to pray was Old Abe, the carpenter—I didn't know then, but knew after, as true a saint as ever lived. But Old Abe had a way of praying that made you feel that you yourself was meant, and there wasn't no one else concerned. I looked at Jim. His face was just awful. At last he jumped up, and with a terrible oath that rang out like a rifle-shot he rushed out of the place. I followed, and found him striding up and down in the moonlight, fuming like a madman, and swearing he'd hammer Old Abe for "praying at him," as he said. That night he got awful drunk, and for weeks no one dared to mention the chapel to him. Even Mr. Abbot could do nothing with him, and found it was best to leave him alone.

'But one Sunday, three months after, Jim went to church again. He went in late, and sat in the back seat. It was a local preacher in charge, a stranger, and not up to much, I thought, and Jim didn't seem to take any special notice, but he looked jollier than usual—more like his old self. In the prayer-meeting, I don't know how it was, but Jim stayed, though he didn't show no feeling like the other time—just sat there quiet, but with a sort of determined look about his mouth. Old Abe was praying up in front, and it was more

personal-like than ever. I looked at Jim, and felt oneasy.

'Then he jumped up sudden, with a flash in his eyes, and made for Old Abe! I made a grab at him, but he swung back his mighty arm and sent me sprawling over a seat.

'I had seen that look on him before, and knew if he hit Old Abe he'd kill him. "Stop him," I yelled, as I scrambled up, but no one moved; they seemed dazed-like.

'Jim went right up to Old Abe, then swung round and faced the people. "I want to be a better——" then broke down and dropped on his knees beside the old carpenter. I never seen anything like it. The people cried and shouted. Big Jim's agony of mind seemed to be such, and his crying so violent, that they were afraid to go near him. But a woman went up, and put her hand right on the great man's shoulder, and talked to him that sweet and gentle, like a mother might talk to a troubled child. I heard her say, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost," and I remembered the pale-faced lad standing on the sleepers at the eighty-mile, and the same lad dashing out in the storm and darkness for his race with Death, and the words rang in my ears, and I could hear nothing else. Then all my prejudice and infidelity and Ingersoll's arguments seemed to melt away, and I found myself sobbing

beside my big mate. And when we went back to our hut that night we knew the Son of Man had come.'

I looked up in Old Ruggy's face. The tears were dropping from his chin on his rough brown hands, and we knew he couldn't say any more that night. Cephas Merritt bowed his head, and said softly, 'God bless the men of the back-blocks,' and I tried to say 'Amen,' but there was a lump in my throat, and I slipped away and went home.

A BUSH COMMUNION AND ITS PRELUDE

'DO ye mane to say, Ruggy, that Big Jim give up fightin' and swearin' and whisky drinkin' suddin and all at once, so to spake?'

It was Constable O'Phelan who spoke, and he hardly waited a moment after old Ruggy had strolled up to the group under the street lamp. We had been discussing the festivities in connexion with the coronation of King Edward—for our meeting occurred the day before the alarming news of the King's illness—but the big policeman's question showed that his mind was more actively engaged in the problem that the conversion of Big Jim had suggested.

'Didn't he, though?' Old Ruggy answered. 'Not but what he'd sometimes do things and say things Mr. Hawke here wouldn't like. Oh, but then, Mr. Hawke never knew Jim. He's never knowed any sample of a bush Christian but me, and I ain't surprised he's afraid they're poor wash-dirt that won't pan out up to assay. Not but that Brother Hawke here has always been kind to me, and put

up with my rough talk, and helped me to be a better chap than I'd ever hoped to be. But Jim seemed to see right into the meaning of things. Not that he ever said very much about religion; only, when he did, he was so quiet and surelike, and the Lord Jesus seemed to be so real to him, and he'd speak about Him like he'd speak about me or Mick.'

'You haven't told us how the revival went on when Jim and you were converted. It must have made a difference in the camp, and roused up a lot of interest. You know, I always like to hear of these things.' It was old Mr. Merritt that spoke.

'Oh, yes, I told you about Jim and me getting down at the penitent-form, and giving ourselves to Jesus Christ. Well, the little parson came back from Witchelina station next day, where he'd been visiting a shearing-shed, and he stuck up notices at the head camp, and rode along to the stonescrapers' gangs, and told all the boys he was going to hold special meetings. He preached every night in the big cook-house (this was the chapel; leastways, all the chapel we had at that time), and the chaps from all along the line, and boundary-riders, and rouseabouts from the station, and Afghan camel-drivers, and all sorts used to come along. Sometimes they'd smoke and laugh and swear all through. Sometimes they'd be quiet as possible.

'If they got a bit restless, perhaps the parson lad would say—"Look here, boys, I'm not making you see this thing like I want to. Well, that's my fault; I can't do it as well as some; but, look here, this hymn puts all I want to say," and he'd ask them to sing "Rock of Ages" or some hymn like that; and how them bush chaps would sing!

'Every night some one would get converted—most of Old Fagin's best customers among them—till about twenty of us met to form a society. There was to be a big thanksgiving service; the converts were to be booked up as members of the Methodist Church; then the communion service was to be held.

'All day some queer yarns had been floating about. Hints were given that there would be no meeting that night. We noticed things were busy at Fagin's shanty, though it wasn't pay day, and mostly none of the boys had much money other times. I got a bit oneasy, and spoke to Jim; but he only bluffed me off, and seemed more light-hearted than usual.

'Things went all right for the first meeting. All Fagin's push was there, but they were unusual quiet. Then the preacher read the rules of the society, and asked those about to jine to stand up. We stood, seven men—Jim and me, Old Abe, the little draper chap who hawked clothes to the back

stations, and three more, as well as nine women and three young people.

'Then all at wonst there was a whistle at the back, and with a yell like a pack of savages Fagin's lot made a rush for the front. The women screamed, and some of 'em fainted, and at the first rush, us in front got driven clean up to the end of the cook-house. As soon as I could see anything for the dust and riot, there I saw the little parson, a bit paler than usual, but quiet and calm like, standing right in front of the women, and facing the howling, swearing crowd of men, sticks and stones, and all sorts flying round his head.

'I was just trying to gather up my wits, which ain't ever very quick, when Big Jim forced himself through the crowd of frightened women. He had tripped over a form when the mob rushed the meeting, and took a minute to get clear of a tangle of legs and furniture. His great paw dropped on the parson's shoulder.

'"Scuse me, boss, I reckon this is my deal. You're good at workin' miracles all right, but if there's any devils to be chucked out, you jist leave that to me."

'There he stood right in the gangway between the two tables—like that feller Samson, what kept the bridge leading to where the golden fleece was—wasn't it Samson, anyhow? Well, it don't matter. Jim stood up like that, and I slipped up alongside

of Jim—not that I wanted to fight, Mr. Hawke, but I didn't want Jim to feel kinder lonely.

'The crowd hushed up a bit just for a minute, and Jim said quite nice and pleasant like,

'"See here, mates, I know yer all, and I know yer wouldn't do no dirty tricks like this, only you've old Fagin's bad whisky in yer. I've done it too, and I feel awful ashamed of it, and I ain't going to be hard on my own mates if I can help it; but we've got to put this 'ere meetin' through. Now, boys, be kind to me and to our little parson here, and to the women, and sit down like sensible blokes."

'I thought for a minute it was all right. Some of the boys made a bit of an attempt at a cheer. Then I noticed old Fagin whisper something to Yankee Bob (generally called "Yank" for short). Yank was a very quarrelsome chap, especially in liquor. He sang out, "And suppose we don't sit down and be quiet?"

'"I'd rather not say nothing about that, mates," Jim answered, still very quiet, "but we must have this meeting."

'Just then a stone was thrown, and hit a woman on the forehead, and she went down as if dead. Then Jim's face lighted up.

'"Now, you must have it"—his voice was quite low and soft like.

'In a moment the tide of battle broke out in double fury, and seemed to turn entirely on Jim.

'"See they don't get behind me, Ruggy," he yelled, and swung himself on the centre of the crowd with his awful machine-like blows.

'He was a giant in strength, and had stood up to Jem Mace for half an hour in a circus ring years ago; and if he could keep the crowd in front of him, was safe enough, though they numbered twenty to one. He had driven them half-way to the door, when a blow from a stick sent me reeling half-stunned into the arms of old Abe. At the same instant two men sprang off the tables on to Jim's back, and bore him to his knees. With a mighty yell the drink-maddened crowd surged in on him, and although he struggled on to his feet and flung his opponents on top of each other to the ground I thought all was lost; for though they went down like ninepins they were swarming all round him, and he had no room to fight.

'But at this instant there was a blood-curdling Irish yell from the door.

'"Oh! begorra, it's beautiful. It's meself that's in it."

'There was big Mick, our mate, wielding a pick-handle, and levelling everything within reach. In about a minute Mick was alongside Big Jim, and the battle as good as won. As the crowd hustled out of the wide door of the cook-house, Mick grabbed Fagin by the collar. The shanty-keeper

had got jammed in a corner by the pack of his own men, and couldn't escape.

'"Come, ye spalpeen, ye're an Irishman and call yesself a Catholic, bad cess to ye that a counthry-man av mine should be sich a mane, meazly blaggard as ye are. Come and see what Big Jim will do wid ye."

'The poor wretch was almost green with fear as he was dragged up to face Jim.

'Jim said, "Let him go, Mick. See here, Fagin. This is a bad business you're the cause of. Yer know what would have happened a fortnight ago if yer'd angered me. But God has put up with me such a lot, and now He's forgiven me for all the evil I've done, I can't do no other than let you off. But look, Fagin, think what yer doing to them poor chaps, that are the decentest, kindest boys anywhere but for yer infernal whisky. God won't let me put my hand on yer, but He'll ask yer about all this some day."

'Then Jim turned to Mr. Abbot, and Fagin slunk off.

'"Now we're ready for communion, sir," Jim said.

'"But," said the minister—"that is—do you think we ought—we've been fighting and"—

'"Why!" Jim cried, and I never saw him so surprised, "isn't it all right? Wasn't it just what He would have us do? Isn't He on the side of

women and bairns, and law and order? The temple wasn't no worse for Him driving the rascals out, was it? "

'And we had communion that day in the cook-house; and mates, I don't know what you would have thought about it, but I know the Master was there.'

OLD RUGGY'S TRIP UP NORTH

FOR some time there had been no meetings of the club. The weather had been so unfavourable that even Constable O'Phelan found a half-hour in a certain kitchen on the beat more congenial than the discussions of our learned society. Then good old Cephas Merritt went down with influenza and bronchitis, so that his snug kitchen was no longer at our disposal. But, most of all, Old Ruggy got restless when shearing time came round, and wanted to be off. He wearied of town, with its noise and dust and street life.

I don't understand what he can see in the rough living and rougher companions to pine for the life of the back-blocks. I never thought we should miss him so much—his rough, kind old face, his queer bush slang, that I used to try to check because it was not proper in a member of the church, even his breaking out sometimes into variegated expressions that wouldn't print, when he got indignant about some wrong or wickedness—all these I feel I could almost forgive if we had him

back again. But he promised to send the club some account of his wanderings. Writing from Illawortina Station, he described his trip up north. This I give after some much needed editing.

'The club will like to know how I got on. Well, I had a tussle with that porter about my bluey. He wouldn't let me take it into the carriage, and said it was luggage, and it would have to go in the van; as if any bushman as calls himself a bushman takes luggage! It's a swag he has, and he likes to keep it as near him as he can. Its a good job I'm converted, or I'd have offered to fight the whole gang of 'em. I got into the train though, and had time to look round on the passengers, feeling lonesomelike with no swag and nothing to look after.

'Just in front was a man off to the Tarcoola diggings. I saw him put his luggage into the van—a tin dish, a double-ended pick big enough to anchor a schooner, a square-mouth shovel, and a tea kettle were among his traps,

'I said innocent-like, "Going to Bundaleer, mate, maybe?"

'He looked awful contempt, and remarked, with some ornaments of speech, "Bundaleer! What do you take me for? I'm proceeding to the goldfields on a prospecting tour."

'"An old digger, perhaps," I remarked, modestly, thinking of the big pick and square shovel, "but of

course you are, I noticed your outfit; you ain't going to be short of nothing when you get there."

'"Of course not," he said, "I'm not one of yer greenhorns, that never saw anything. But perhaps you're going digging too?"

'"No; I'm only a shearer, but I'd like to hear about them diggings. It's awful interesting, they tell me, turning up nuggets, and knowing men that's made a fortune in a week, so to speak." (You might tell Mr. Merritt that I wasn't just stringing on the new chum digger for fun, and I was careful not to tell any lies; but I thought I might be able to do him a bit of good somehow. So I didn't let on that I put in twenty years on the deep leads in Victoria).

'Then he got chatty, and let me into all the secrets of gold-prospecting. And he talked about "gold dust" and "concessions" and "pay gravel" till I knew that the only gold-mining he ever did was in his employer's back office with a Californian Deadwood Dick novel for a text-book, when he oughter been entering up hides and taller in the day-book.

'When he finished telling about the last fortune he lost in a single night playing six-handed euchre for £100 a corner at a Russell Street gambling-hell, I felt it about time to take a hand. I thought I'd try to get in a Bible story parable-like, so I says,

'"See, mister, I'm awful grateful for you giving a poor old bloke like me the tip, and me a stranger, too; and you've helped to pass the time splendid. I ain't got no original experience, so to speak, but there's an incident happened a bit ago that I can vouch for on the best authority, and a tragedy in it too, a'most as bad as that fellow you told us about shooting all them chaps what cheated at cards. This is the story as near as I can tell." Then I told the story of Ananias and Sapphira as though I had seen it all.

'The people in the carriage what had been listening to the new chum digger had got up around us while I told it, but now they stared at him, for he looked like a man with toothache all over his body. And then he stammered—

'"Say, mister, d-do you belong to th-that society what Peter runs?"

'I'm afraid Brother Merritt would have thought my story of Ananias and Sapphira a twentieth-century version, but I think it did him good. He kept awful quiet, and when we got to the Burra he changed carriages.

'For the rest it was much the same as usual. The other chaps were too well seasoned to be skeared off lying by the awful fate of their Bible ancestors; but went on talking about all sorts of impossible adventures and villanies they had had a hand in.

'Two days of the slowest, shakiest, and dirtiest railway travelling on the continent fetched me to Hergott. Two more days, humping bluey over ironstone gravel and through perished blue bush, brought me to a bush pub, where I found I must wait a blessed fortnight for a camel train to get out east.

'Now, as you fellows in the club perhaps never had to hang out at a bush shanty, I may as well tell you how I got on. Things were a bit lively, because the chaps had been coming down from the far nor'-east sheds beyond the Cooper, and the shanty was fair on their way to the railway. A big bullock driver, who used to be a great bruiser and bully, kept the pub. He was getting very fat and short in the wind with overfeeding and bad whisky, and his fighting powers weren't more than up to thrashing black boys and bushmen what had the "shakes" on 'em.

'When I said "No" to his offer to shout tangle-foot whisky all round in my honour as a new arrival, and told him I was ready to pay for as much decent grub as I could eat, and wanted a comfortable bunk, and that I wasn't given to booze, he only said something I needn't write, but treated me civil and square all the time.

'With six shearers, two rouseabouts, an Italian hawker, a boundary-rider who used to be in the Canadian back-blocks, and three half-castes, all

more or less busy knocking down their cheques, to say nothing of two or three loafers hanging around for what they could get, things wasn't according to the rules of polite society, as one might say.

'When I got there things were getting kinder quiet. Nobody fresh had come in for a week, the money was getting nearly done; and the same day one shearer and a half-caste, who had been lounging about for a couple of days, their money all gone, got a gentle hint from the shanty-keeper to make themselves scarce, and slouched off to tramp to the nearest station.

'But next day all hands turned out to meet a chap that came in from the nor'-east from one of the early sheds. He was on a splendid horse, and leading a pack-horse with his swag—a big one—that I found after was full of good new togs with new blankets and a fine rug. Half a dozen was ready to take his horses round and feed 'em and help generally.

'But the newcomer just said a bit sharp like, "No, thank'ee, mates; jist leave them 'osses there. I ain't going to stay longer than to wash down a little of this dust."

'I found afterwards that he'd dodged every pub. for near two hundred miles, camped out, and got his own grub—for yer see he couldn't trust hisself to stay near the smell of grog, and he was

determined like to get his cheque safe down to his wife and young 'uns, somewhere Glanville way.

'Well, they all swarmed into the bar after him. But he just got a beer in a pannikin and put it down in one act. Then two or three wanted to shout. But he said, a bit impatient, he wouldn't take a drink from no one, and turned to leave.

'The pub.-keeper said something sarcastic about blokes what was too mean to spend anything themselves and wouldn't let others spend a cent. for the good of the house.

'Then Scotty (I learned afterwards that his name was Aleck Fraser), said, "Well, some of you chaps seem a bit seedy. I'll shout once all round, then I'm off."

'I don't know how it was. Bushmen say the grog-sellers put stuff in a man's drink. I don't know about that. Back-blocks grog is bad enough without anything put in it.

'Anyhow, Scotty hadn't had his second drink five minutes when he was silly as a sheep. I saw what was up, and tried to get him away, but it was no good.

'Another drink or two, and there he was—talking the blessedest rot, ready to dance, or sing, or fight, and paying for drinks for the crowd as fast as old Soaks could hand it out.

'But, there, I needn't tell you all the particulars. It was the same old game. He handed over his

cheque for forty-nine pounds to the publican to mind for him. When he wasn't too drunk for anything the publican played nap, and threw dice with him, and, of course, always won in the end, and generally shepherded him for a week. Then he got him sober enough to let him know his money was all gone.

'But the drink devil was strong in him. His pack-horse and saddle went, then his riding-horse, then his swag bit by bit; and somehow all these got back into the clutches of the landlord. I tell you if ever there was a fortnight of hell it was in that bush pub. I had seen it before—God forgive me! I had been as bad as any at it; but now the devilry of it made me pray and storm like a madman.

'You can't understand it, Mr. Hawke, but I think the Lord did. I opened out on the pub.-keeper; but he always had three or four bullies at his elbow, and he laughed in my face.

'Then after eleven days they bundled poor Scotty out into the "dead house," and left him to get round best way he could. I did what I could for him. He had the shakes awful, and it took all I knew to keep him from getting D.T.'s. When he got round, so that he could think, it was dreadful. He'd sit by the hour and cry like a babby, and moan about Lizzie and his poor little kids. He showed me their photo—all he had left of his stuff

except his shearing togs that he stood up in—a likely looking lass with great soft, sad eyes, and three of the brightest looking little bairnies you ever see.

'"Poor Lizzie! Poor Lizzie! And another day would have brought me to Hergott, and I'd have got home." He moaned it out again and again, as if his heart would break. And I—well, sometimes I felt mighty like crying too, and then I'd break out and say things I oughtn't. Then a thought struck me. I'd try to get him to go to Hergott, and take the law against the infernal harpy that had fleeced him.

'But it was no good. His spirit was all gone, and he only said, "It's awful good of you, and you a stranger, too; but it ain't no use for me to take your money and throw it after what I thrown away already. I've seen it tried lots of times. We poor bush blokes get cleaned out like this. We know that they can only claim a certain amount a day; but if we go to law, they get a clever lawyer and beat us every time, and we have to pay more money for nothing. No, mate, it ain't no good!"

'Next day I found the camel train was coming; so I went to old Soaks, and told him what I thought of him, and said he oughter give poor Scotty a pound or two to help him on the road. But he only swore, and said he'd kick him out if he didn't clear. I felt mighty riled, and had to keep saying inside,

"Do good to yer enemies" over and over again to keep my hands off him.

'Just then poor Scotty tottered in. The shakes were on him bad, and he wasn't more than the wreck of the smart chap that come there a fortnight before. The dreadful sinking and craving for a drink had come over him, and he gasped through his chattering teeth,

'"For the love of God, landlord; for the love of God, give me a drink! Yer won't turn agin a poor chap that's spent every cent in this bar, will yer?"

'You know, Mr. Hawke, I hate whisky like I hate the devil; but I believe the archangel, if he had looked into the agonized face of that poor lad, would have paid for a nobbler to help him recover from his awful drinking bout.

'I was ready to pay for Scotty's drink, but I waited to see what the pub.-keeper would do.

'Well, he jist said something about psalm-grinders, with a string of blanks I won't fill up, give me an onexpected swing that sent me rolling out of his road, and grabbed Scotty by the scruff of his neck to pitch him out. Well, I didn't quite know I'd hit him till I saw the big publican picking himself up off the road holding his bottom jaw, what was broken; and then I knew that I'd driven that upper cut a bit harder than some people might think a Christian and a member of Cephas Merritt's class oughter.

'Howsoever, he growled out, as well as his broken jaw would let him, that it served him right; and then he asked me to take a five-pound note, and look after Scotty Fraser on the road a bit (for I had fixed up to take the lad on with me). Then I patched up old Soak's jaw with some sticking-plaster and a bandage as well as I could. That afternoon our camel train came along.'

When I finished reading the letter I looked up, and Mr. Merritt's eyes were shining, and he said, 'God bless Ruggy!' And I believe, under my breath, I said 'Amen.'

RAVEN'S STORY

I MUST say that after reading Old Ruggy's letter I felt considerably disturbed in mind. You see I am a teetotaller, and in a general way I sympathize with temperance reform, but I can't bear extremists; and our best people at Demas Street are strongly adverse to faddists of all kinds, and regard enthusiasm about these things as very bad form.

Now, as junior circuit steward and local preacher, I feel the responsibility of my position. I have always been careful not to do anything that might alienate any of our best people—the pillars of the church, so to speak. But when I read about the brutal 'lambing down' of that poor bushman, and thought about his wife with the sad eyes, and his little ones asking when 'daddy' would come home, and he trudging back a destitute beggar to the back-blocks station, I felt I wanted to do something. But that was just at first. When I thought about it, and considered my position at Demas Street, I concluded it would not be prudent for me to take any prominent part in temperance matters just now. Mr. Siphon, who used to be connected

with the trade—of course he retired years ago—certainly would not like it; and with our Century Fund and other enterprises on hand it would be most indiscreet. Besides, I have always condemned letting one's feelings carry away their judgement.

I didn't intend to say anything about the matter when the club met last week, but Dick Raven opened it up at once. Raven is always creating embarrassing situations for me. I sometimes wish he would not attend. I think I retorted a bit coldly; I didn't want a discussion, and didn't feel very comfortable on the matter—that made me a little more positive than usual.

'Ought not something to be done? Well, I've thought about the matter. Of course it's a very hard case, but the man was a great fool. And you know the well-known axiom—Hard cases make bad laws. I quite think Old Ruggy's rabid teetotal prejudices have led him unduly to emphasize a quite exceptional case—quite an exceptional case. And exceptional cases will occur.'

For once Father Merritt somewhat agreed with me. 'I can't think,' he said, 'that much of that kind of thing exists now. I believe it used to be very prevalent in the old rough days. But the spread of education, better police supervision, the influence of religion even in the far interior, even the self-interest of great employers of labour, who would be injured by the prevalence of such

practices, these things must make such instances rare, I should think. I can't believe that there are many such evil men as the pub.-keeper that Ruggy described to us.'

I saw Dick Raven's black eyes flash and his usual indifferent, cynical air all disappear. I knew something was coming.

'Look here, Mr. Merritt, I don't want to say anything disrespectful. I know you speak out of the goodness of your heart, and are never willing to believe men to be utterly bad. But I tell you you don't know this infernal trade. You haven't been in the hell it creates; you haven't felt the passion it breeds; you haven't seen a father's honour, a brother's life, a sister's purity go down in that vortex of all that's foul and devilish. You haven't felt your blood boil and your heart break till—God pardon me for saying it—you cursed the Almighty to His face, because He hadn't swept the accursed thing from the earth with the flames of perdition.

'I tell you, Mr. Merritt,' he went on, 'if you had ever lived one chapter of my life you wouldn't endorse any of Mr. Hawke's smug, easy-going phrases about exceptional cases and hard laws.

'Man!'—and he turned on me savagely—'shake yourself out of your canting self-righteousness and your fine society wriggling and time-serving, and do something to help those who are trying to save their fellow men from this curse.'

Then he changed suddenly, as he does at times. 'But there, Mr. Hawke, don't be hurt at my wild words. You don't see this thing as I see it. Let me show you this case of Ruggy's is not the exception, but rather the rule. I met a man last week—an old chum I had lost sight of for six years. He'd been having a good time at the show and had "done" the lions of the city generally. A bright, intelligent fellow, with a good education, a tremendous worker, but just the one failing—getting on the spree at intervals. He will work for a year or more and never touch liquor, and then—well, everything will go, to the last rag for which he can get sixpence. And, look you, there are hundreds of men in Australia like that. Well, as I told you, I hadn't seen him for six years, and I wanted to know where he had been. Then he told me all about it.

'For five successive years he had made the attempt to reach Adelaide from the district where he has worked—a hundred miles north of Wilcannia. Every time after shearing he had started, determined to see the city; and every time had got cleaned out, in much the way Ruggy describes, when he reached Wilcannia or sooner.

'A month ago he made his sixth attempt, and reached Wilcannia. He got a good rig-out, bushman fashion, from a respectable business man, first thing. Then he hunted up a gentleman who

had the reputation of being a straight goer, and stated his case. He said, "Now, see here, I've got all the clothes I need, I've got sixty-five pounds left. I want to keep three pounds, and I know I shall be as drunk as I can get before night. Then there's ten pounds I want to carry me to Adelaide. That leaves fifty-two pounds. Can you fix that so that it can only be drawn in Adelaide by me—I myself, no transfer business, you understand—and so as I can't sell it or borrow on it, or anything like that. I want it fixed so that it's no good to any one but me, and no good to me except in Adelaide. Then that ten pounds. I want you to keep it, and only give it to me—no matter what I say or do—when I'm dead sober and ready to start right off for Adelaide."

'Well, the gentleman got him a draft negotiable only on personal presentation in Adelaide, and sure enough he was blind drunk for three days. Then he wanted money, but it was no use. He stormed and swore, and threatened and pleaded. He offered to sell his draft for forty pounds, or twenty pounds, or ten pounds, but still it was no use. The gentleman was interviewed by the publican and others, who took a purely benevolent interest in the bushman, but he showed them the draft was valueless. At last the chap got thoroughly sober, and came to the custodian of his bank draft with only the haziest idea as to the details of what had happened.

Then he learned to his infinite astonishment that he still was the owner of sixty-two pounds.

'His foul passion had spent itself. He came to Adelaide, cashed his draft, had a good time, seeing everything that was to be seen, and hadn't drunk a drop since leaving Wilcannia!

'Here again you can say it's an exceptional case. But there are hundreds such; and they are the helpless dupes—nine times out of ten—of the first pub.-keeper they come to. Perhaps my poor old chum will have learned a lesson this time. If not, he will go on year after year. When he gets too old for hard work he will go shepherding. Then some day he will be found dead on the run or in his hut, or he will be sent to the Destitute Asylum to wear out the remnant of a wasted life. I tell you, you Christian men, and members of Churches, God will want to know what we've been doing about these things some day.'

What an uncomfortable fellow Dick Raven is!

A SHEARER'S SUNDAY

ACCORDING to promise, Old Ruggy sent us an account of a Sunday at the Parrawarrina shearing-shed.

'It was a dirty, wet day, when wallaby-shooting, football, and hurdle-jumping was at a discount, so to speak. Most of the chaps didn't get up till dinner-time. Then they helped Quiet Bob and the Slushy clear away and wash up, so as to have tables for euchre and nap. Some others sat on the edge of their bunks mending their clothes, some reading yaller-backs and old copies of the *Bulletin*, and some sprawled round and didn't do nothin' in particular.

'Jist a bit before tea, Black Harry, who was standing at the door, sang out, "Look 'ere, what's this?"

'We went to the door, and there was a chap jist plugging up the road to the cook-house on a bike covered with mud, and the most dejectedest looking cove ever you see. And his turnout didn't appear to no better advantage on close inspection. His bike covers were cut through and patched with green hide. Half a dozen spokes had got knocked

out, and substitutes made out of fencing wire; a piece of the frame was broke halfway through, a consarn rigged up with a piece of mallee and green hide thongs to strengthen it. And, blessed if I could say which looked most used up—the bike, or the skinny, jaded-looking chap in ragged khaki what rid it. He was going to explain who he was, and so on, but the ringer Yankee Bill just says,

'"Oh, blow yer chatter, mate; just chuck yerself in there, agin that fire, and get a feed. Yer look as if yer want it pretty bad."

'By the time the young fellow had got outside a good square meal, and had dried hisself off at the fire, tea was over, and the table occupied with a half-dozen card-parties; while the rest read, or yarned, or smoked as usual. Then the young chap stood up and sez,

'"Look here, mates, I didn't want to come in on false pretences; but you were kind enough to hustle me in to tea, and wouldn't let me tell you. But I'm a kind of a bush missionary, you see. Not a parson, you know, but just a young chap going about trying to say a word to men like myself, to do a bit of good if I can, to leave a book or a paper at the huts on the run for the women and young 'uns that don't get any too much of that sort of thing, you know; and just try to bear a hand anywhere I can, and do what I think Him we're trying to follow would do, if He were on the back-blocks."

'Well, the boys looked a bit glum, most of 'em. Some one muttered something about not wanting no parsons, and there was a growl of approval along the table, and then among the card-players. Then the missionary spoke again.

'"Look here, chaps, I ain't come to interfere with what you want to do. You've been kind to me, and I'm going to respect your ways as much as I would any gentleman that asked me in. I'd like to have a bit of a service, but I ain't going to ask you to put away your cards, or your pipe, or stop anything you want to do, and I'll manage so that there won't be a lot of noise to disturb you or anything like that. And, see here, I can sing a bit; if you like, we'll have a good old song together—a song that's good for Sunday or week day, and after that I'll give a recitation, if you don't mind. Now, what do yer say?"

'They was fair took, and voted in favour after their usual fashion.

'"Fair thing that, old man," "Bully for the parson," "He's a white man clean through, you bet," and similar notes of approval went round.

'Then, standing there agin the fire, he started to sing, "Home, sweet home." I ain't much for music; but the way that lad poured out his heart in that grand old melody, I tell you, beat all the grand choirs and high art concerts ever I heered, all to nothin'. He finished the first verse, then he says,

'"Now, boys, we'll sing that verse altogether, then I'll sing the next."

'And didn't they sing! I never saw nothing like the looks of them chaps, since the day they stood around the grave of poor Bill Scott, what got killed trying to get Frenchy's little 'uns out of the burning hut last year. When the song was through, he said,

'"Thank you, mates. Now, some of you come from a spot over the water that you love better than life. You won't mind me singing a little song I'm very fond of," and he swung off with the "Irish Emigrant's Lament."

'Why, Mr. Hawke, if even Constable O'Phelan, with his hatred of everything Romanist, had been there, he'd a done just what I did—mopped the tears out of his eyes, and tried to swaller a lump that wouldn't go down nohow.

'By the time he was through there wasn't a card or a pipe or a yaller-back to be seen nowhere. The boys sat around the table or on their bunks and took in every word. Then he slid off into a recitation. It was Tennyson's splendid "Relief of Lucknow," and we seemed to see the drawn faces of the brave, hunger-smitten men and women, and our hearts jumped up with a great joy when the twang of Havelock's pipers skirled out their message of life and deliverance. Then he said,

'"Well, mates, that's as far as our agreement goes; and I ain't going to take advantage of your

attention if you don't wish it. What shall it be?'

'Then Yankee Bill jumped up. "I say, mister. I'm going to speak for every mother's son in this 'ere shed. You've treated us fair, and we're going to show you we can act like gentlemen to a bloke what's a gentleman to us. You go on, and every man of us will listen respectfully to any gospel tally you think it right to deal out. Some of us is a bit rough, but we reckon to get into a better shop than this 'ere world some day."

'The rest grunted approval, or hammered on the table to express their satisfaction. Well, the missionary began with a yarn about a young fellow what left his home in the old country to try his luck at the diggings. It was the kind of thing most of us had seen pretty often—and was true to life. Then, somehow, he turned the story into the prodigal son. He didn't use many Bible words, but he made it that real that no one could make any mistake. There wasn't no orthodox application. He just left every one with a big craving in his soul to git back on good terms again with the Great Father.

'Then he said, "You don't mind me speaking aloud to the Master about these things, do you, mates?"

And every head went down as quiet as could be, and he prayed. Leastways, it wasn't like most praying that I've heard in church. It seemed as if

God was nearer to him than we was, and all his heart and soul seemed to go out in talking to Him.

'I looked up sideways once, half expecting to see some strange presence, but there was only the young bush missionary with wide open eyes fixed on things beyond, and talking to God.

'No word was said next day about the service. But when the missionary came into the shed to say good-bye, after mending up his bike, the hand-shake he got all round would have made the knuckles of a weaker man sore for a week. And I happen to know that the overseer had orders to give him a cheque for his mission funds that probably made him only less glad to receive than it made the boys to give.'

I was about to say something about the danger and impropriety of using songs and recitations in a religious service, even under the exceptional circumstances of the back-blocks, when the words came to my mind, 'That which God hath cleansed, call not thou common or unclean.'

I don't believe the words have any application in this case; but I went home in silence.

A CHURCH INVESTMENT

THE letters we had received from Old Ruggy raised again the question of our Methodist Mission funds—and that in an unexpected way. I knew well Brother Merritt's deep interest in this branch of our work, and had reason to suppose that he gave largely out of his scanty income to send the gospel to regions beyond. But it was not Cephas Merritt who introduced the matter this time. We had been chatting about things in general under the lamp—which, by the way, was not alight; for it was a lovely moonlight evening—and Constable O'Phelan had just sauntered up, when Dick Raven asked abruptly,

'What does Demas Street give to Home Missions?'

Now Dick had never taken part in previous discussions on this topic, and I quite thought he looked coldly on some of the quixotic enterprises of our Missionary Boards. I happened to know the facts, for I had primed myself for a resolution I had succeeded in carrying against the amount of estimate allocated by the Conference to be raised by our Circuit. We get nothing out of the Home Mission Funds, and

I contend charity should begin at home. I wasn't quite sure whether Dick's question was to me, but I answered,

'Well, our estimate last year was forty pounds for the whole Circuit. A great imposition, I think —but we only raised thirty-two pounds. We are going to ask that the estimate next Conference shall not be above thirty pounds. By the way, Mr. Merritt, I am looking to you to support the Circuit resolution in the District Synod. I can supply you with an outline of my speech, if it will help. We must keep down these estimates.'

'What do your congregations number throughout the Circuit, Mr. Hawke?' asked Raven, carelessly.

'Let's see,' I replied, 'I think we return for all the churches eighteen hundred and fifty this year —there has been a great increase since the Rev. Chrysostom Jones has been in the Circuit.'

'See here,' said Dick, 'I don't quite understand you fellows. As far as I can make out, the idea of Jesus Christ was that all those who claimed to follow Him were to go out and tell His message to others. He seemed to think it was of prime value to the world—indeed, nothing else seemed to count for much. If any one really couldn't go out preaching to the people, and helping poor devils up out of the mud, and that sort of thing, he was under obligation to send some one else—that is, he was to valuate himself so to speak—reckon how

much his work ought to be worth in this business —and give that much to send the other fellow to take his place. Well, now, you reckon thirty pounds for Demas Street, that's 3½*d.* per head, near enough, per year.

'Seems to me it's a mighty cheap valuation. Oh, yes, I know you are doing a lot of other things, but this 'ere 3½*d.*, and perhaps another 3½*d.* to Foreign Missions, represents the "Go-into-all-the-world" part of your obligation.'

'I'm a bit surprised to hear you talk like this, Mr. Raven,' I said. 'I didn't know you thought much of missionary effort. And, well, you'll excuse me, but I didn't quite think you claimed to be a Christian.'

Dick answered, 'I don't claim anything. I haven't come up to just the beginning of what I understand Christianity claims. Further, I don't see a ghost of a show of my ever getting up to it. I've read somewhere that a man who will do before he is a Christian what he believes he ought to do after he's a Christian will come to be a Christian. Now, I'm not sure whether that's so. But it looks to me the only feasible way; and I have been trying for a bit to square my concerns by that rule. But, as I said, I haven't come within leagues of it, and don't see any likelihood of soon getting there. Still, I'm satisfied I shan't be a Christian till I do. But, you see, you people have entered into this

thing. You claim all its benefits, here and hereafter. You sincerely believe that God gives you a hundredfold more in this life and life everlasting in the world to come; and then you go and set down the valuation of your duty to the people outside your immediate locality at $3\frac{1}{2}d.$ per head per annum!!

'See here, as I understand it, the New Testament demands that the centre of gravity of human life should be shifted, so to speak. Instead of the central point being self, it is to be Christ. The whole life is to be built on the pattern of Him who pleased not Himself. The Christian has to be ruled in every detail of life, not by regard for Number One, not even by the blind instinct of altruism that the social evolutionists rave about, but by a deliberate voluntary surrender of all personal considerations to the interests of the kingdom.

'Now this is a pretty large order. Thousands of fairly decent fellows about us understand what it means right enough, but they ain't ready to go in for it. They are honest, but not quite sure that the game is worth the candle; and if it is they ain't sure they can play the game out. Hence a lot of fellows stand out because they haven't cheek to claim the benefits without facing the responsibilities.'

I confess I felt a bit cornered as well as surprised; but I wasn't going to submit to Raven's criticism

without retort, for though it was very quiet and courteous, it cut a bit deep.

'But look, Dick,' I said, 'surely you don't claim that a man or a church has no rights? And, besides, when you attack us like that, may I ask what you give to the Home Mission Funds? I've never seen your name in the list.'

Dick smiled in a way that made me feel uncomfortable.

'We won't go into that, please. I've said I'm trying to do what I'd expect to do after I became a Christian. And I've also said I haven't even begun to come up to that standard.

'But about rights.

'No; a man hasn't any rights as against God. What have you that you have not received? If you are bought with a price, and intend to take advantage of that transaction, you are not your own; and all your talk about rights, if they run counter to the interests of the kingdom, is mere nonsense. It all turns on the question as to whether a man is determined to live for himself or live for Christ. But I can't see any sense in a man trying to do both at once.'

Dick left abruptly to attend a committee meeting of the Democratic Club—a thing I don't hold with—and we sat on the kerb for some time in silence. Raven's blunt words made me uncomfortable. Ought we to spend two hundred pounds on new

upholstery at Demas Street when some other churches were crippled with debt? Was the indirect bribery of picnics, rewards, &c., that made our Sunday school the most popular in the city the kind of religious training Jesus would give to the children? When we determined to use our surplus income of one hundred and fifty pounds a year to keep up 'the finest trained choir in the State,' had we seriously consulted the wishes of the Master in the matter?

Dick Raven is annoying, impertinent. He is more than half a pagan, and has no business to be in the club at all. I wasn't sure what Cephas Merritt would say about it. He has such a queer habit of looking at things in an unorthodox way; and I didn't feel like any more of that kind of thing just then. So I said good-night, and went home.

I'm afraid I didn't score after all over that subscription-list point. Miss Cassie, our collector, would not say, but I believe that 'X,' who is the largest subscriber on our home mission list, is none other than Raven. If I wasn't a local preacher and junior circuit steward, I'd say, 'Confound the fellow!'

THE WOMBAT CREEK SUNDAY SCHOOL

THE word had got round somehow that I had received a letter from Old Ruggy after several weeks' silence. I don't think I told anybody except Constable O'Phelan and Mr. Merritt, and I don't see what they make such a fuss about the old man for, though I must confess I felt a little curious, not to say excited, when I got the letter. But every member of the club was there the other night, and ever so many visitors. I intended to give a careful reply to Raven's criticisms of our Home Mission effort, and show him how little he knew about it, and how the bottom would fall out of our Demas Street cause if we followed his wild advice. But I hadn't got further than my first point when O'Phelan rudely broke in, 'To Jericho wid yer barney about Dick Raven and yer missionary collecting; it's Owld Ruggy we want to hear about, bless his sowl. Come now, Misther Hawke, rade his letther to us, won't ye?'

I looked severely at the policeman. He has a kind heart, but is sadly lacking in the good manners that education and a responsible position in the

church impart. Well, I saw I must humour them, so I read Old Ruggy's letter.

'Hooray, Mr. Hawke; would you believe it? After I don't know how many years I've come across my old mate, Big Jim. You know, him what I told you about, that chucked the Chinkey at the little parson chap, and afterwards got converted along with me in the revival at the eighty-mile. Well, he's been through some queer things since I saw him last; I may tell you of them some day. But I want to tell you about him and his Sunday school while it's all fresh. I found Jim a-settled down, ganger of the repairers at the Wombat Creek Siding. Yer see, I'd cut out at the Parrawarrina shed and come down here, and the new shed ain't far from the railway siding, two miles over the range. Well, Sunday come, and Pat Leary and Jimmy, the half-caste, says they was going to the Wombat to Sunday school. This was about the queerest thing I'd come agin in the bush. Still, I was glad they was going, and I said I'd go too. We got there a bit late, and went straight into the ganger's kitchen. A big man was sitting there with his back to the door, six youngsters from about seven to fourteen years old in front of him, a young chap of twenty, Tom Spears, a repairer lately sent down from the far north, and an old fellow called Botany Bill, one of the queerest old blokes you ever laid eyes on. Well, Jimmy

and Pat pushed in, and the big man turned round, and, Mr. Hawke, you could a-knocked me down with a whipcracker! There was Big Jim, a bit older looking and a bit fatter, but Jim himself—my old pal, the whitest man that ever humped a bluey or kicked a blackguard.

'It was a bit before Jim could get on with his lesson after that. He seemed to feel chokey and shook up. It seems he was a-telling them about Gethsemane and them fellows arresting Jesus. It was all as solemn and earnest as could be, but perhaps the way it was put wouldn't quite please you, Mr. Hawke.

'As they heard how Judas betrayed his Master, one of the lads expressed his contempt for the traitor in no measured words.

'Jim interrupted:

'"Stop, stop, Tom. There ain't any sense in going on like that agin Judas. What we can do is to try to make up for it, just turn out the clean thing every time, and do what Jesus wants us to do. You see, He's alive, and wants chaps that'll stand by Him now as much as then."

'Then he went on to tell about that awful midnight in Gethsemane, telling the story so simply in his rough bush talk, that the little chap of seven sat staring in his face with his eyes strained open, and a big tear in the corner of each, and little hard wrinkles around his chin. He told them of the

lonely agony of the doomed, deserted Man of Sorrows, craving in His breaking heart for human sympathy.

'"And yer see, boys, He knew He must go through it—God told Him so—must go through it, so that God could forgive and help poor chaps like us. But Jesus wanted those mates that had been with Him all the time, and that He loved better than life, to stand by Him in His great trouble. Three times over He went to them and found them fast asleep."

'Jim went on to tell of the midnight gang with the priests and Judas leading, and Jesus stepping out all calm and stately like from the deep shadows of the olives, His timid followers cowering in the dark behind Him, and Peter nervously fingering his sword-hilt. "And would you believe it, boys? If that Judas didn't go right up to Jesus, and kissed Him on the cheek. That was a sign, so that those who had come to seize Jesus would know which one to take."

'Tom Spears had been grinding his teeth. Now he broke out—"If ever there was a low down villain—"

'But Jim stopped him.

'"We must get on with this story, Tom, or I'll never get through. When Judas had kissed Him, all the priests and the soldiers and rabble they had got together, come up, and asked Him if He was

Jesus. He said, quite calm-like, 'Yes; I'm Jesus. What do you want?' And He looked them straight in the face, and they shuffled back ready to let any one do their dirty work if they could get out of reach of those eyes. But the priests were not going to let them escape their job, but told them to carry out their warrant and no nonsense. They tried again, but it wasn't no use. As soon as they met that look, with its awful calmness and holiness, they dropped—some of 'em—like men shot dead.

'"One man, who was the high-priest's servant, pulled himself together and up he went. Peter, him you remember that had the sword, made one mighty swish at him, which just shaved off his ear as neat as you like."

'Pat broke in with an expression of delight, but Jim stopped him.

'"Yes; but, Pat, the Master said he oughtn't to have done it. God, His Father, you see, let all things happen to Jesus for our sakes, and He didn't want anything to interfere with what He had to suffer. And, would you believe it, Jesus just touched the man's ear, and it sprouted out as good as ever."

'"Ugh!"

'"But, Jim," rejoined Pat (and there was a tremble of great anxiety in his voice, and it was very low this time), "Ye won't be cross wid me.

I'm only a poor ignorant Irish bhoy, but I can't abear to think of going back on any one that's been kind to me. Ye said it was the prastes what was at the bottom of all that devilry. Was they—that is do ye think they was the prastes what me poor owld mother told me to mind, and like Father Lawton—him that put me into his own bed when I broke me leg in a drunken row—bad cess to me—and gave money when I got well, and begged me wid great tears in his kind owld eyes to give up drinking and be a man. Say, Jim, ye don't think it's them ?"

'Poor Pat held his breath and waited for Jim's answer as if his life depended on it.

'"Oh no, Pat, old man. They wasn't anythink like your dear old minister—your priest, Pat. They were Jews—Jewish priests, you understand. The priests your mother told you to respect and obey are good men. They love Jesus, and are trying to get you lads to serve Him. I've got no hard word for any man that is trying to do, and to teach others to do, what he thinks Jesus wants to get done. But, look, lads, we've gone long past our time. Ruggy—my old pal, Ruggy—will ask the good Father in heaven to keep us chaps from drink and all sorts of wrong, and to help us to live the way Jesus would live if He had to be in the shearing-shed, or screwing up fish-plates on this 'ere railway."

'Well, Mr. Hawke, I prayed, and I don't think the Lord was ever nearer to me, even in dear old Father Merritt's class-meeting, than in the kitchen of the railway cottage that afternoon.

'Botany Bill sat with his grizzled old head down looking in the fire, and never moved or spoke all the time Jim was teaching, or prayer time either. Queer old chap is Bill. Perhaps I'll tell you something about him some day.'

Thus Old Ruggy's letter ended. I must confess I am more puzzled than ever to make out things on those back-blocks. Cephas Merritt only smiles in his queer way, and says he has no doubt the Lord can understand the situation quite well. I wasn't quite satisfied, however, and walking home I asked Dick Raven about it.

'I say, Dick, do you think Ruggy is putting it on a bit? Do you think there are any people in this Christian country who don't know the story of the trial and death of Jesus? It seems incredible.'

'Mr. Hawke, it's like this. In the far interior you'll find some men of the highest education—men who know the world like an open book; but you'll find others—like Tom Spears and the half-caste—who know no more of any religion than a Hottentot.'

TEMPERANCE SUNDAY

THE fact that next Sunday was the Conference-appointed Temperance Sunday did not escape the eye of Dick Raven. I had no idea till recently that this cynical half-sceptic could feel so strongly about such a thing as the temperance movement.

'Well, Mr. Hawke, what are you leaders at Demas Street going to do about the drink question on Sunday?' This was his salutation as we gathered under the street lamp.

'I understand, Dick, that the Rev. Mr. Jones intends to preach once on the question. The children had the international lesson on Ephraim last Sunday, and I think an address will be given on the matter to the whole school next Sunday. That's all I've heard of so far.'

'Humph! Then you'll go into recess till next November, while the devil works twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week to destroy the people all our church work is designed to save.' Dick was getting warm, as he usually does about this topic, and I stood on the defensive.

'Well, Raven, it's no use grumbling at us, and doing nothing yourself. What do you suggest?'

'I'm ready to suggest this—that all the temperance and Christian and decent people line up on some distinct platform, and try for something practicable, and the only practicable thing that has come into sight so far is State control. Now, hold a bit. I know what you are going to say. I know it isn't an ideal remedy, and no person's ideal remedy is going to be a common ground of action for all the diverse lot we want to get to work together. But is every man to stick at his own crank and turn that while his brother goes to the devil? See there!' And he pointed up the street to a flaring gas advertisement that stood out against the sky from a well-known public-house. The wind wafted to us the refrain of a rowdy music-hall song, with a rattling accompaniment. I knew that the nightly sing-song was in progress, and that the two highly decorated barmaids that presided at this altar of Bacchus would be having a busy time.

Raven continued—'That's largely the secret of the business. What poor wretch living in the stuffy dens of these back streets can resist the temptation of the light and music and jollity of that mantrap and the ninety-five similar ones that flourish within these four terraces? The special

attractions of the business create the appetite that it fattens on.'

'But look here, Dick,' I said, 'have we any right to abolish a great private business that has been recognized from time immemorial. What about the liberty of the subject?'

'All rubbish!' (Dick's rudeness is intolerable). 'Haven't we abolished private business when we took up letter-carrying, and railway construction, and school teaching, and a hundred other things—and that, not because these things were being conducted in the interests of the devil, but merely because of increased public convenience.'

'But, Mr. Raven,' said Cephas Merritt, 'that's just my difficulty. If this trade hadn't got an evil character, I should see no objection to the State conducting it. But ought we as a people to be the proprietors of a confessedly injurious trade?'

'If absolute prohibition were practicable, and it were a question between prohibition and State control, I should say we ought not to maintain the trade. But every sane man knows that absolute prohibition is as far away as the millennium, and the sole question is between our present plan of licence, that makes every citizen just as much a partner except in name, and a system which, by reducing the business perhaps two-thirds, will reduce your partnership by an equal amount.'

'But what about the costly premises now occupied?' I asked; 'would you practically confiscate their value and throw them as dead property on their owners' hands?'

'I'm not greatly troubled about that. No value is destroyed except the fictitious value which this unholy business creates. Many such premises would be needed for legitimate accommodation apart from the drink business; and for the rest, the revival of ordinary business resulting from a large proportion of the money now spent in drink going into right channels will solve the difficulty itself. £200,000 a year goes over the bars in South Adelaide; let the bulk of that be saved, and there won't be any outcry about unoccupied business premises.'

'But,' I rejoined, 'if you did as you hoped—lessened drinking two-thirds—we should lose two-thirds of our customs and excise revenue, that comes from this source. Wouldn't that be a temptation to the taxpayer to make up the loss out of profits, and so he would be induced to push the trade just as the private person does?'

'Excuse me, Mr. Hawke; you're not such a fool as the British Chancellor of the Exchequer who talked about the nation "drinking itself out of debt," are you? Whatever form of taxation you adopt to cover any possible loss—and some of your forms are idiotic enough already—nothing can be

so bad as that by which a man swallows three-fourths of the money and wrecks himself body and soul in the process, in order to give the Government the other fourth as excise duty! And then the Government spends that fourth and a bit more to punish the man as a criminal or keep him as a pauper.'

'Be my sowl, Dick, you're right'—it was Constable O'Phelan broke in—'Ye'll spoil my billet intoirely, and it's stone-breaking or somethin' half of us bobbies will have to go to; but if Mr. Hawke here saw the starving women and little childer like I see 'em, and lads being trained to be thieves, and girls gettin' ready to be a curse to themselves and to the world, it wouldn't be logic and political economy, and the liberty of the subject he'd talk about; but he'd want to bate this black divil of drink wid the handiest bit of a stick ye could give him. It isn't meself can tell how all the difficulties about this ere State system are to be got over, but if ye hav'n't got statesmen and leaders that's got brains enough for the job, it's a twentieth century lot with the latest improvements that ye'd best import at wonst.'

I went home feeling that, after all, there may be something in the scheme my socialistic friend so vigorously advocates. Anyhow, I went to sleep endorsing the time-honoured resolution that something must be done.

BOTANY BILL

THE last thing I reported about Old Ruggy was his visit to the Sunday school at the railway siding conducted by his old mate, Big Jim. I must say I got interested in spite of myself in that story of Gethsemane, done into Australian bush English. It seems somewhat irreverent and improper, but Old Ruggy's account of it was so natural and earnest that somehow the majesty and meekness of the Man of Sorrows has seemed more real to me ever since. Even the slang of the half-caste, and the way in which Tom Spears tried to express his indignation at Judas and his companions, did not shock me. It almost seemed the right thing for them, and I found myself half glad they said it.

A few days ago another letter came from our old bush friend. After moderating the language somewhat, it reads thus:—

'I promised to tell you something about Botany Bill, didn't I? Well, although I know him ever so well, it's very little it seems to me I can put on paper about him. You know, we chaps in the bush

don't get to know much about the past history of one another. We fall in with a chap on the wallaby or at a camping-place or in a bush pub, and we have a yarn and a smoke together, and he tells us his name is Bob, or Scotty, or Jim, or 'Frisco, and we never ask him no more. Then, perhaps, we're going to the same shearing-shed, or diggings, or railway, and without any word of agreement or anything formal-like, we go mates. Perhaps we go on for months or years, and eat and live and work together, and never know more about that there chap but that he is Jim or Scotty.

'If he sticks by his pal, does his share of graft, and pays for his share of the grub, it ain't often one troubles about where he came from, or if he had any grandfather. Of course, while some chaps never say anything about themselves, others talk a blessed lot. But we generally don't know anything about these last either; because while it's the proper thing in the bush to be interested and pretend ye take in all a fellow says, at bottom you don't believe one word of it.

'Well, Bill was always one of them chaps that never said a word about himself. Perhaps in his case some would have been a little more curious than about others, because Botany Bill wasn't just like anybody else you ever met; but if they wanted to know, they never got no forrarder. He

would just about fit in with a bushman's version of the Prayer-book—he did the things he ought not to have done, and he left undone the things he ought to have done. Bill could be best described by the things he didn't do. He was a "negative quantity," as the manager at Munjigabbi Station said—whatever that means. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink, he didn't fight, he didn't gamble, he didn't spin yarns, and above all he didn't swear. Now, this was enough to spoil any man's reputation in the back-blocks, and yet Botany Bill is the most popular chap I know from Coondambo to Angle Pole.

'I might say, though, it wasn't always like that; for at one time the general idea was that Bill was a miser. He always camped and "batched" by himself; and the storekeepers and the ration bosses at the stations said he only got the plainest grub. As I told you, he never drank and never shouted for any one, so the story got about that he had stacks of money banked in Sydney or hidden away in the ranges. For why? Didn't he work hard, get the best wages, never lost any time, and spent next to nothing?

'Now the wust thing you can say about a bushman is to say he's mean. A fellow may break all the ten commandments and they won't think none the wuss of him. P'r'aps he gits carefully out of the road when the "traps" from Sydney or Adelaide

are looking round with a warrant for some one, and they will put the troopers on the wrong scent, and make a bit of a hero of him. You see, most of these chaps look on a police trooper as a natural enemy that ought not to be in decent society. But if they thought a man worked hard for money, and wasn't as ready to spend it on his mates as on himself, they looked on him as about as bad as a Chow.

'Well, they put it down that Botany Bill was a money-grubber, and for a long spell he got a mighty bad time of it. He was jeered at, but he wouldn't answer back. They played rough larks on him—not good-natured jokes that any chap that isn't a greenhorn only laughs at—but nasty, spiteful tricks that would make most men mad, but he didn't even swear. Then they'd do things that by all bush rule a fellow must fight for, but he wouldn't fight. Only sometimes a look came in his eyes that seemed to make even the roughest bully of the lot stop a bit short of something desprit, and go off muttering something that wouldn't print.

'One day something happened that changed all this. It was this way:

'Jack Summers, the boundary rider at Munjigabbi, broke his leg, and all his youngsters were down with typhoid, so someone got up a tarpaulin muster among the station hands to help Jack a bit.

Some one sent along a ten-pound note, and we all thought it was the station owner. But Potts (as we nicknamed the soft-hearted cook's slushy, who had charge of the subscription list) blabbed out that it was Botany Bill! Do yer believe me, Mr. Hawke, if Bill didn't get that mad that he swore—no man in the nor'-east ever heard him do it before—and we watched for a week in fear that he would punch poor Potts's head. Then somehow it leaked out there wasn't a blessed subscription to help a sick child or a poor feller what got hurted, or anything of the sort that he hadn't been in—planked down more than any other dozen chaps put together, and swore vengeance on any one what would let on about it. Then after a while a lot of other little things got to be known, how he'd helped all sorts of people in all sorts of ways—not letting his right hand know what his left hand was up to, so to speak; and all that knew him come to vote that Botany Bill—him that everybody had called the scalyest skunk of a miser—too mean to give a pal a drink, and not pluck enough to fight a bar boy—they voted him the whitest man from the Murrumbidgee to the Barcoo.

'But this didn't make no difference to Bill. He didn't often speak except when some one spoke to him, then his few words would be pleasant enough, but he seemed as if he never used more than he could help.

'Still nobody knew who he was, or where he came from, and didn't care very much; because, as I told you, these 'ere station chaps will follow the pedigree of a racehorse to the third and fourth generation, but they don't care an empty cartridge-case about the pedigree of a man.

'One queer little incident made me believe that Botany Bill was a bit different from most of us bushmen. It was two years ago, while we were shearing at Parrawarrina. Bill was there; and a young chap, a bush missionary, who was a probationer, made Parrawarrina his head quarters for about two months. He brought a bag full of books on his bike, and mornings he would walk up and down near the shed, jawing over a lot of the queerest stuff you ever heard. One night we had heavy rain, and the sheep got wet so we couldn't shear next day. The chaps got up a football match. I was lying in my bunk, and no one else in the big hut but the young minister, and he was stewing over them books, and seemed to be in an awful worry over it. He kept muttering away that "all y's were x's, and a's that were not b's were z's," and said something about it being logic, till I stared at him in a fright, and thought the poor chap had gone off his head. Now Bill had attended all the services, but he never stood up, or took no part, or ever spoke a word about religion good

or bad; and I don't know if ever he spoke to the young minister.

'But just as the parson was scratching his head, and staring blank and puzzled-like at his book, in comes Botany Bill. He heard him muttering over his x's and z's.

'"Say, mate, what's it you've got there?" says Bill.

'"It's logic, Bill, I'm trying to work up for the 'senior,' and I'm taking this and some other stuff; but I've got fair bushed with this logic."

'Then Bill looked cautiously round to see if anybody was about. He didn't see me in the bunk, so he goes up, and says in a tone as different as night and day from the bush slang he always used—

'"I know, Mr. Williams, I've heard you working at it for weeks. Would you mind my helping you a bit, just where the work is a little strange to you?"

'And, if he didn't go and put him through all them sillyjissums, as he called them, as slick and easy as he'd run down the flanks of a merino ram!

'Then they went for some Greek stuff, and Bill ran off a lot of it word and word about; and, besides, he went on talking about some old chap named Socrates that all this Greek seemed to be about, and how they got him on the hip for poking fun at their conceit and ignorance; and, at last,

how they killed him by making him drink poison they gave him. Then they got talking about Euclid, who set problems I couldn't make head or tail of; and Bill, he drew a lot of angles and circles with a stick on the floor, and called them all a, b, c, and so on. I might say I didn't think much of his drawing, and couldn't make no sense of it after they left.

'Botany made the preacher promise not to say a word to any one about their working together, and they bargained to put in an hour before breakfast every morning, out in the scrub, to go through this Euclid and double-Dutch business.

'This didn't help me much to know who, after all, Bill was. But months after, when Mr. Williams sent me word that he had passed his "Senior" with credit in Mathematics, Greek, and Logic, I knew that somehow Botany Bill had had a lot to do with it.'

Cephas Merritt got quite excited over Ruggy's account of Botany Bill, and insisted that I should urge Ruggy to tell us whatever more he might know concerning him—a request that I shall be quite willing to emphasize when I next write to our old friend.

CHRISTMAS AND THE POOR

WHEN most of the members had mustered under the lamp on Monday evening, I remembered that probably the approaching holidays would interfere with our meetings for a week or two. I felt in a very cheerful mood. Perhaps it was something of the festal spirit of Christmas that had reached me in anticipation. Two pleasant incidents had occurred during the week. A small investment that I made some years ago in land, had, by the unexpected adoption of the Outer Harbour Bill, returned me a net profit of five hundred pounds. I shall be careful not to say anything about this to Dick Raven; he always says some absurd thing about unearned increments. This socialism means treason to all the rights of property.

The other thing that happened was my nomination by the Rev. Chrysostom Jones as senior circuit steward for the ensuing year. To hold the premier office in a circuit like Demas Street is no mean honour; and I am not ashamed to say it has been my lifelong ambition. However, it was neither of

these personal experiences that made me feel especially gracious towards the members of the club when we met, as I supposed for the last time before Christmas. The man who doesn't feel 'seasonable' at this time of year is unworthy of the solid roast-beef kind of cheer that every true Britisher associates with Christmas. Besides, there were several casual visitors at the club that evening—friends of one and another of the members. Among them a nephew of Father Merritt's—an old St. Peter's boy, I learned afterwards, who is manager of the Great Karkarook Cattle Station in the Far North. Another visitor was a crony of Constable O'Phelan's, John Dempsey, a foreman carpenter in a Port Adelaide building firm.

I was naturally anxious that the strangers present should not form an unfavourable opinion as to the cordiality and good manners of the club membership. So I gave my greeting with a little less reserve than I generally preserve towards certain members of our gathering.

'Good evening, Mr. Raven; compliments of the season. A bit early; but I mightn't see you again. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you.'

Before any of the others could reply, Raven grunted out his characteristic 'Humph,' and I saw he was in one of his unpleasant argumentative moods.

'Which, being interpreted, Mr. Hawke,' said he, 'means, I suppose, that each man is to make Christmas, the festival of Christ's birth, an excuse for whatever personal gratification he most desires.'

It was Mr. Merritt who answered—'Your criticism, Dick, may be in part deserved. But there is another side. Thousands who make special effort to gather their friends around them in genial and innocent reunion at Christmastide also spend much money and effort to make the season brighter and happier for the poor and outcast.'

'Yes, Mr. Merritt, we do something for the poor, I admit; but the very doing of it becomes a sort of tacit apology for not removing the conditions that cause the poverty. No; you needn't taunt me about socialistic fads. I am not such a fool as to suppose that a different system of land tenure would do everything. But any man who isn't a fool ought to see that it means a good deal. For seven years thousands of farmers have been starving outside Goyder's line of rainfall, and we haven't statesmanship enough to get them inside, where there's abundance of room for them, if we had brains enough to settle the question of land occupation on principles that would be just and fair all round. But, as I said, it isn't all. There's drink and gambling. There's sweating by employers, in spite of Factory Acts; and there's loafing and ignorance and inefficiency of workmen;

and there's the swarm of parasites and malingerers that hang on to all your charitable funds and institutions, sworn never to do any honest work. Oh, yes; there's a lot of things to be done besides giving out a few tickets for Christmas cheer for the poor! and you had better go to the root of the disease instead of tinkering at a few of its symptoms.'

'But, Misther Raven,' broke in P.C. O'Phelan, 'it's not meself that's the laste bit of a sociologist, nor can I see jist now what more I myself, Dennis O'Phelan, can do to put men back on the land, and to stop 'em dhrinkin' bad whisky, and to find 'em worrk whin they can't find it, and make 'em do it whin they do find it. But, Dick, me bhoy, in these 'ere narrow sthreets on my beat, I see the poor women wid sad faces an' droopin' shoulders, an' I see little babbies in their arrms wid little skinny limbs, and long fingers ye cud see the joints of, and poor peaky little faces; an' begorra, man, it fetches a lump in me throat that I can't swaller, for I know the wee mites 'av tugged where God and Nature told 'em to, and there was nothing for 'em. Then I ask meself what Him that fed the five thousand, and petted the children, would do if He was Constable Dennis O'Phelan. And it's not meself that could look in the faces of me six well-fed youngsters and philosophize about political science and not do an extry bit at Christmas for the skinny mite and its famished mother. I ain't

good at Bible argument, and I ax yer pardon, Mr. Hawke, you being a preacher too; but whin Jesus saw a man eaten out wid leprosy he did'nt jist contint himself wid giving a lecture on sanitation; but He touched the man with His own hand and spoke to him out of His own big loving heart, and made him well. We can't get to the bottom of these things jist immedjitly and to wonst, but we can keep on doing a bit to help to make things a little sweeter and brighter as we go on.'

'Dennis, old chap, you're just right there.' It was the carpenter who broke into the conversation. 'It means a lot that each one should just do his own little bit to help some one to have a real joyous Christmas time. But do you know, gentlemen, I think there's a lot more of that kind of thing being done than some people imagine. If you wouldn't take it amiss of me, being quite a stranger to most of you, I'd tell you a little thing that came under my notice yesterday.'

'Foire away, Jack, me bhoy,' the constable exclaimed, 'we'll all be plased to hear it.'

'Well, then, I was walking back to the port from an outside job. Just in front of me were two chaps I know. The first one, that I may as well call Bill, is a coal-lumper, and was just going to work. Jim, his mate, is a warehouseman at old Crabtree's. I wasn't trying to listen, but I couldn't help hearing what they said.

'It was Bill started:—

'"Say, Jim, there's old Bags. Stacks of money he's got. A chap could have something of a Christmas if he had his stuff."

'"Well, now, Bill, look here; s'pose you had it, what would you do?"

'"Do? Well, first, if I had his money I'd build a house like his'n. Twenty rooms, if he has one."

'"Yes. How many rooms do you think old Bags lives in at a time, eh?"

'"Why, what d'ye mean? Can he get his old fat carcase into more'n one to wonst? Well, I don't suppose he can. But what's that to do with it?"

'"Oh, not much; but there are three rooms in your cottage, I think. Well, what else would you do with his money?"

'"Let me see, Jim; guess I'd have some of them easy chairs and couches and things he's got."

'"Yes, you would, would you? How did you sleep last night, Bill? Pretty well?"

'"Sleep! I put in thirteen hours humping coal out of the *Windermere* yesterday; then I slept dog tired for ten hours."

'"Old Bags didn't sleep no better than that, did he?"

'"No. Blessed if I believe he did when you come to think of it. But, Jim, there are a lot of other things I'd have. See old Bags's garden."

'"Yes, I know. Did you see his garden, Bill?"

'"I did. And the smell of them flowers beat all I ever come up to."

'"Do you think old Bags sees 'em and smells 'em any better than you do?"

'"Well, no, I don't suppose he does for that matter, for he's half-blind, and takes snuff. Don't expect he gets on with the flowers inside as well as I do over the fence."

'"Does he do anything else by 'em?"

'"No. I don't know that he does, 'cept pay for 'em. It never struck me that I get as much out of his flowers as he can."

'"But you ain't told me all you'd do with old Bags's money. Fire away."

'"Well, I'd have plenty of tasty grub—the jolliest blow-out this Christmas ever you see. And have a bit over for every poor beggar that wanted it."

'"Yes, that's all right, Bill. What does your tucker bag weigh?"

Bill grinned.

'"Weigh? Well, there's about half a pound of biled mutton, two hunks of bread, one of bread-and-butter, a bit of currant cake the missus put in after, and a quart bottle of tea. S'pose it goes a bit over 3 lb. altogether."

'"You'll eat most of that dinner time, won't you?"

'"You bet, and want a bigger feed—something hot—when I get home."

'"Do you think old Bags will eat any more than you to-day, or like it any better?"

'Bill grinned again.

'"Don't suppose he will eat half as much. But see, Jim, the difference in his grub and mine."

'"No difference after it's down, Bill, except yours agrees with you better'n his does. And if yours goes down as well, what's the difference?"

'"Well, if you ain't a beggar to argue! But what I'd like to do is to have a bit to give away."

'"That's right. See here, Bill. Old Bags gave away fifty pounds last Christmas in poor tickets. Now you gave up having a plum duff so you could give a dinner to old Mother Stokes and her crippled husband. Now, stop a bit. I know all about it, though you never let on. Then there was an old woman in the Bible give a 'a'penny, and the Lord said she gave more than the lot. Do you see the point?"

'"Well, maybe it's all right, Jim, old chap, but I should like to have a bit of money to help folks that ain't got none."

'"Just so. But what next, old man, would you do with old Bags's money?"

'"Well, I don't know. You've twisted everything clean round so. I was going to say I'd jack hard work, and never have the ganger yelling, 'Bill,

shake up them baskets a bit lively, can't yer?' But I don't know if old Bags's business don't bother him as much as a 120 lb. basket bothers me. I'll tell the missus about all this. I believe it'll cheer her up a lot."'

. . . . . .

I had to leave to attend our Leaders' Meeting, but I found myself thinking the lessons of contentment and generosity learned from lumper Bill might bear personal application. Just then I picked up Mr. Smith, the senior poor steward, and he happened to remark that the largest donation he had received so far to the Christmas Cheer Fund was from Mr. Richard Raven.

I felt surprised and a little uncomfortable. Something suggested the question—How much of that five hundred pounds belongs to the Lord? I don't believe in yielding to sentimental moods and fancies; but I have told Mr. Smith that I will further consider what my Poor Fund contribution is to be.

OLD RUGGY'S CONVERT

I HAVE gravely feared that our informal gatherings, which I have sportively called the Street-Lamp Club, would come to an end. Uncertain weather seemed to have interfered with our attendance for some weeks, beside which, an attack of asthma having prostrated Mr Merritt, we could not meet as usual in his genial kitchen; and it seemed we had no heart to do anything without the inspiration of his kindly old face. However, a rumour having gone round that some news of Old Ruggy had come to hand, there was quite a muster round the lamp last Monday night. No one seemed to feel like owning up that it was special interest in the rough old bushman that had brought them together, but I think I know.

We had hardly finished congratulating Mr. Merritt on his partial recovery, and got settled around his bright kitchen, when Bob Spriggs broke in, 'You've got a letter from Old Ruggy, haven't you, Mr. Hawke?'

Bob was a youth of about twenty, a devoted worshipper and understudy of Ruggy. The old man

had won him away from a gang of larrikins, and it was whispered that in some unexplained way he had saved him from going to jail for some senseless escapade, and had got him under the influence of the Young Men's Class at Demas Street Church.

He seemed to be earnest and devoted; but I never could tolerate the slanginess of his speech, and I felt compelled conscientiously to oppose his being admitted into Church membership. However, Ruggy's pleading and the testimony of soft-hearted Cephas Merritt, his class-leader, prevailed, and I had to give way, and so (I'm a little ashamed to say it, seeing I am now senior circuit steward) Bob Spriggs is a member of society in the Demas Street Circuit.

They all seemed anxious to hear Old Ruggy's letter. I had marked out personal paragraphs here and there, and moderated the language in places.

'Why you haven't had a letter,' Ruggy wrote, 'is partly because I expected to spend Christmas with my pals (if you'll allow the word, Mr. Hawke) in the city. But I got pegged down in this drink-soddened hole, and never got no further' (I might explain that Ruggy was writing from a well-known frontier town; but as some of his references are a bit personal I have dropped the name, and shall call the place X.). 'Yer see, I took up with Tom Spears—you remember about Tom Spears, Mr. Hawke, him that I met at Big Jim's Sunday school,

away up at the Wombat Creek Siding. He was awful ignorant; had been bred in the back-blocks, and knew nothing except about hard work, hard drinking, and hard swearing. But the way Big Jim told about Gethsemane and the arrest of Jesus in the garden fair captured him. After the Sunday school in the ganger's kitchen, I talked with Tom a bit, and he seemed real shuk—under conviction of sin, I would say, if you could think of any man being under conviction of sin and telling yer all his misery in slang phrases. Tom was quite a young chap, but the most awful swearer I ever met—and that's sayin' a lot. Well, the more Tom thought over it, and the more I explained, the wus he got. Then I asked him to go along with me to my camp, and we talked it out for the whole three miles. And you may believe me Tom was converted. Not that I'm sure whether he would have passed a Leaders' Meeting at Demas Street. It ain't easy for yer to understand, Mr. Hawke, how these chaps look at things, and language that you'd think just awful is as natural and innocent to them as breathing.

'Next morning Tom came out of the hut, where he'd stayed by himself, and the first thing he says was: "Ruggy, I tell yer I've got it. The right down, real, clear, chink thing. What was it yer called it, old man? Getting converted? Being regenerated? Well, anyhow," and his eyes shone—

well, they shone like I've seen Cephas Merritt's eyes shine, and his voice got that soft it seemed like I've heard a girlwife coo to her first-born babby. "Well, anyhow, Ruggy, old man, I've talked all night to the man Jesus—Him that rascal Skarryit, Jim called him, sold right out to His murderers for thirty pieces of silver—Him I grieved, and neglected, and swore at. Oh, Ruggy, ain't it too good to be real true, that Jesus will take any chances in me—me the wildest, ignorantest bloke in all this back-blocks?" And so the poor boy ran on. You won't understand it, Mr. Hawke, an' you'll think it awful irreverence, but I think the good Lord Jesus knows all about it, and His great loving heart has taken in poor Tom Spears, like He took in Old Ruggy years ago, and has put up with all his queer ways ever since. And here I've gone rambling on, it's a way old men have, and not told you yet why I didn't get to town for Christmas.

'Well, Tom and I camped together for some weeks, and worked together till the holidays began to unsettle everybody, and one and another began to drop off south. In those weeks I could see what a change had come over Tom. It seemed as if his only joy in life was to try and do some good turn for those about him—laughing as if for very joyousness in the doing of it, when any one tried to thank him, bluffing them off with some joke that was full of quick, happy wit, in spite of his never

having any education. The chaps that knew him wondered more and more, and argued over the matter when he was absent.

'"I'll tell you, chaps, what it is," said Peter, the cook—a burly rascal whose prime excellence was that he could punch the head of any man on the station. "This yere change in Tom's the queerest thing I ever seed. I don't take no count of religion. I never had none, and have got on pretty middlin' so far without; but if it's religion what's made Tom Spears what he's turned out to be this few weeks, a small ration of it wouldn't do none of us no harm. An' what's more, I don't want none of you to get pokin' any muck at Tom about sarm-grinders an' that kind of patter; not that Tom ever worries any one by talking religious to him. But if any fat-head wants to kinder pussicute him, and Tom don't think his religion will let him give his pussicuter a good hidin', I'll just happen along and do it for him, if you don't mind." Peter looked round in a way that guaranteed approval of these choice sentiments, and Tom didn't have any more hard times among his mates after that.

'In the week before Christmas Tom Spears and I came down to X., with the intention of passing our Christmas in Adelaide. He had never been in the city, and was looking forward to it with as much excitement as a child. I found I should have to stay in X. for a few days, because of some

business with the Razorback Prospecting Syndicate I was interested in. Tom and I stayed with some decent people a bit out of the town. For the first day or two I never felt no anxiety, then I began to feel a bit worried over Tom. He had been in X. two or three times before, and had knocked down his cheque; and I found out that the pub.-loafers and the blood-suckers in the trade had got on his track. However, Tom stuck close by me, bluffed off their invitations to booze with a good-natured laugh and a joke; but I wasn't easy in my mind. Things were duller than usual in X. The season had been bad, and bushmen weren't so plentiful as usual, so the pub.-keepers seemed to be making special efforts to catch the few that came.

'The day before Christmas Eve I'd been kept long at a private meeting of directors and had to leave Tom pretty much to himself. Towards evening I was just finishing up with the secretary of the company, Mr. Peter James, who was also town clerk, when a local publican who was a stranger to me came in. He broke out at once:—

'"Here, Mr. James, quite a stroke of luck, awful glad, you know—that account for rates and arrears, I'll be able to pay you up, and a lot of other little things. Times have been beastly bad; but it's quite providential. A chap staying with me—a beggar to paint things red—right down good sort—change for this; it's £43. Oh, yes; your cheque

will do. Banks shut; must hurry back. My barman not well up to these things; quite providential, really. A chap from somewhere about Wombat Creek. I'm . . . "

'He didn't get out any more. I had him by the throat like a tiger. I must have been clean mad for a bit. I hope the Lord will pardon me, Mr. Hawke; but I stormed away, not knowing what I was doing. Then I left the landlord rather badly damaged, and rushed off to find Tom Spears. I can't tell you the rest now, Mr Hawke; the horror of this last fortnight in this hell of drink and vice has got hold of me, and write I can't. I must get out under God's pure stars again, and try to tell you about all the tragedy and heartbreak of it next time.'

So the letter broke off abruptly, and left us wondering and dreading what the sequel would be. As I went home I wondered whether the temperance fanatics were so far wrong after all, and felt a bit sorry I hadn't helped a little more in the Mission Band of Hope.

OLD RUGGY'S FAILURE

IT didn't need more than the expectation of hearing the sequel of Old Ruggy's account of Tom Spears to bring a full muster of the club together on Monday evening. Mr. Merritt had sufficiently recovered to meet with us in our favourite place under the street lamp, and almost every member of the club had brought along a friend, so there was quite an audience gathered under the dazzling white Welsbach. There seemed a tacit understanding that no one wanted anything but the old Bushman's letter, so I promptly produced the epistle. The writing was shaky and blurred, many sentences were mutilated and incomplete, and, in spite of my corrections, were not easily readable.

'I think I told you, Mr. Hawke, in my last about coming down to X. with my young chum, Tom Spears, and how I managed to shepherd him and keep the public-house gang from gettin' hold of him right up to Christmas Eve. Then that soul-murdering rascal came into Mr. Peter James's

office, and talked about getting the cheque providentially from the boy from Wombat Creek.

'You won't like to hear of me fighting like a heathen with the publican, and leaving him so that he had to have the attendance of Dr. Splint for a week. I won't say any more about that.

'I found poor Tom howlin' drunk at the "Kangaroo." I don't know very clearly what I did or said. I felt as if God had deserted His world and handed it over to devils. I never dreamed but what Tom was saved, and that drink and all sorts of wickedness were done with for ever. Yer see, even when I was watching over him a bit anxious like, I never really thought it was possible that anything like this would come about; and, oh, Mr. Hawke, I'm afraid the brethren will think badly of me, but I remembered about some one in the Bible what said, "Why don't yer curse God and die?" and I couldn't help it, but that seemed just the only thing left me to do.

'I know it was wicked and all that, but I was mad—mad as a poor, ignorant old bushman, with his heart torn into a quivering mass of pain, could be.

'When I saw Tom there, the centre of a crowd of pub. roughs, all shouting, singing, and cursing together, all my rage with Tom died out, and a great pity came into my heart, like I never felt before, and I pushed through the crowd and I said,

"Tom, old chap, you'll come with me, Ruggy, your old mate, yer know—yer won't turn down on yer pal, will you? Come, Tom, my boy, I want you partic'ler." The poor boy pulled himself together and straightened up, though he was trembling all over. A scared, awful look came into his eyes, like a man might have who had murdered some one in madness and then come to know what he'd done.

'"Oh, Ruggy, what have I done? And Him—the Lord—Him I said I'd serve and follow. O God, let me get out of this."

'I got him by the arm; but a great fellow, dressed like a toff, but with a face all blotched and bloated, caught him by the shoulder.

'"Wait a bit, chappy; you're not going till you make your shout good, are you? A bushman that's a white man don't take a drink with all hands and then sneak off without standing his shout all round in return. Come, I paid last. Ask the old buffer there to join in and be sociable; we're going to make a night of it. Come, old man, it isn't the first time you've done a nobbler or two; come on."

'Then the dissipated swell fellow went to drag Tom away from me, and all my dreadful passion and temper flamed up and made me like a raging animal. I flew at my enemy with a torrent of awful words. I don't remember much except the image of that evil, taunting face, and the ring of his laugh, as he jeered at me, a shrivelled old man,

tackling him. When I come to I was in bed, and a quiet working man that lived next to where Tom and me had been lodging was sitting near me. He had gone into the "Kangaroo" for his reg'lar pint on his way home, and saw all the affair. He said I fought blindly, like a mad savage; but lor' bless you, I was nowhere. That swell was twenty years younger and twice as big; and, besides, he'd studied law at Oxford and used to be the crack boxer of his set. He jist straightened up, and two or three blows like Slavin or Sullivan might have given left me senseless and more'n half dead on the floor.

'They'd nussed me back to life, but it was five days before I knew a soul. Not a word could I learn about Tom, and it was two days more before I could totter out to look for him. I tried the police, but they didn't seem to think it their business to hunt round for a drunken bushman.

'But at last the kind-hearted old inspector seemed to take pity on my weakness and misery, and sent a trooper to trace Tom's whereabouts. He found him in a cheap boarding-house. It seems he fell ill with their infernal poison—he was only a young chap and couldn't stand bushman's snakejuice like the old hands could—then bein' a noosence and p'raps thinking he might die, the landlord had paid for a week's grub and dumped him down in the boarding-house.

'Oh, it was awful. I nussed him back to a bit of life again, but I couldn't get a spark of hope into him. I coaxed, and prayed, and argued, but he only looked at me with his big, sad eyes, and said,

'"It ain't no use, Ruggy, old man. It's awful good of you to take so much trouble about a dead failure like me. But I tell you it ain't no use. The Lord gave me a chance. Spite of all my wickedness He heard me when I asked Him to save me. And now I've clean throwed Him over. Wuss than that there Skarryit."

'And so he would go on. I wanted him to go to the city with me, but he wouldn't budge. After a few days he didn't seem quite so hopeless, and once or twice hinted about going back to the bush and trying to start again with a clean slate; but I never dreamed of what he really did. At the end of a week after I found him he disappeared—clean gone when I woke one morning! Later on I got a note he'd left for me, full of gratitude, but saying he wouldn't let me know where he'd gone because he'd have to go and begin his fight again by himself.

'He ended—"I ain't going to be a drag round your neck, old man, and p'r'aps be a dead failure after all."

'I was rushing about X., trying to find some hint about poor Tom till evening, but all I could learn was that several bullockies had left the evening before for different stations, and it was thought

Tom had left later in the night meaning to catch one of them up at the camping-ground and go into the back-blocks.

'I was trying to follow up this clue when 'bout midnight a message came in that a man was killed on the Nor'-West track. It was Tom. Dead beat with walking, weak and ill as he was, he'd caught up a bullock team, and gone to sleep in the dray. The driver was drunk, and drove over a big mulga stump, and my poor boy Tom had rolled out under the wheel.

'After the police inquiry and the "Accidental death" verdict I buried what was left of the lad I'd prayed and fought for, in the bush cemetery what hides up who can say how much of the work of the death-traps of the back-blocks. Yes, Mr. Hawke, this is poor Old Ruggy's failure; but, after all, has the Man of Nazareth failed? Poor Tom was trying to get a fresh start; mightn't it be the Lord has taken this way of giving him a new start up yonder?'

When I finished Ruggy's letter Cephas Merritt wiped his eyes and said 'Amen'; and I felt inclined to do the same, although I wasn't sure whether *Field's Handbook* would support Old Ruggy's theology.

THE TRAGEDY OF BOTANY BILL

FOR some weeks our informal gatherings under the street lamp have been in suspense. Old Father Merritt has been seriously ill—apparently nearing the border-land—and no one seemed to have any heart to meet without him. However, he has been slowly recovering for a week or two, though I am haunted with the fear that our dear old class-leader will not be much longer with us.

To the surprise of every one, Old Ruggy, of whom we had not heard for months—never indeed since his sad account of the death of his young mate, Tom Spears—appeared in the congregation at Demas Street last Sunday morning.

The word got passed round in the evening that Father Merritt would expect us in his kitchen-parlour on Monday night. Needless to say, there was a full attendance.

'Begorra, if it isn't a lovely sight for dim eyes,' exclaimed Constable O'Phelan as he hovered around the chair where Cephas Merritt sat propped up among his pillows, 'and yer kind ould eyes as merry as ever, even if ye do look a wee bit thin

loike. And here's Ould Ruggy, too,' he went on. 'It's meself that's glad to welcome ye back among us. For it's many's the toime ye've helped some of us to understand better what the Great Master av us all would loike to have us do.'

We soon saw that a great change had come over our old friend Ruggy.

His buoyant and aggressive optimism had become subdued to a chastened devotion, not less sincere, but more self-distrustful, and more forbearing towards others.

His speech was just as artless and natural as ever but it had lost some of the breeziness, which, after all, I must admit, was an irresistible charm, and also much of that daring freedom in the choice of language at which I had always trembled.

Every one, as by tacit consent, looked to Old Ruggy to give some account of his most recent experiences.

'You are very good to me, mates,' he began; 'I can't tell you how it warms my sad old heart to be among you again. You want to know how I've been getting on all this time? I haven't got much to tell about myself—leastways nothing much that is good.

'After my poor boy Tom met his death, I thought to come on here to the city; but somehow I hadn't any heart to do so. Then I got low and miserable-like, and felt I warn't no good to anything or any-

body. I got a fear on me that I was bound to drag anchor, and make shipwreck of the faith, like Paul says. And this fear I couldn't shake off.

'Yet I had a queer feeling that it wasn't for myself that I was afraid of becoming a backslider. I felt that I was such a good-for-nothing old hulk that it didn't matter an empty cartridge what became of me. But when I thought of Him that had done so much for me, and put up with my ignorance all these 'ere years; and when I thought of you, Father Merritt, and Mr. Hawke, and all who had helped me and trusted me, I felt that to let go all would be the blackest ingratitude.

'Then a new thought struck me. The wonder is it hadn't come to me before. I knew my old mate Big Jim was working somewhere up the Great Northern line. I would get away and find Jim; for I knew if I could only get with him it would drive away my wretchedness and unbelief. My old mate has a mind that sees right through to the truth of things—the truth that is hidden away within all the jungle of doubt and mystery. He sees right through when my dull old eyes can't see so much as a rabbit track among the ti-tree and fuzz.

'Well, I found Jim alright, and I need only say I wasn't disappointed. Jim made things plain for me. I got to feel that God had done the best, perhaps, for the poor boy Tom, and that He wouldn't turn His back even on a poor old makeshift

sort of a Christian like me. And when he prayed as we knelt there in the ganger's hut by our two selves, it was like I've heard Mr. Merritt here say lots of times—

> God came down our souls to greet,
> And glory crowned the mercy-seat.

'But, mates'—and Old Ruggy's eyes were full of tears—'I have come near to dishonouring my Lord; my feet have wellnigh slipped; and I feel I want to walk softly all the rest of my days.

'But, there, I don't want to talk about myself, and I guess you've had enough of an old bushman's faults and failings.

'A while ago the club was anxious to know a bit more about an old mate of mine—Botany Bill. Well, some strange things came to light about him while I was living and working with Big Jim in the Far North.

'You remember I came across him at Jim's Wombat Creek Sunday School. Well, it seems after that he kept about them parts, working at all sorts of bushcraft, living by himself, just the same silent sort of chap he had always been. His camp was about three miles over the range from ours, where he was doing some prospecting for a big company what had an option over a copper lode.

'One day the boundary rider from Karatta Station, that most of us got our meat from, was drinking a

pannican of tea at our camp, and happened to say he thought Botany must have cleared out, for he hadn't come in the last twice for rations.

'Jim looked very troubled.

'"As sure as you're there, Ruggy," he said, "old Bill is bad, laid up in his hut. It ain't likely he'd a-left without coming this way along the bridle track. We'll jack work this afternoon, and go over and see what's up with Bill."

'We started just after dinner, taking a few little things with us that we thought might be handy if poor old Bill was laid up.

'There wasn't any sign of life as we got up to the prospector's hut. We knocked, but got no answer, so we pushed open the door and went in. Sure enough, it was as Jim said. There, in the little bedroom, on his bunk, Bill lay, wasted almost to a skeleton. He didn't move when we went in, and his eyes were shut. I stepped back, and felt a bit queer, for I thought he was dead.

'But Jim lifted his head, and spoke to him in that low, firm voice of his:

'"Bill, old man, it's Ruggy and Jim come to see you. Come, mate, don't you know us?"

'His eyelids quivered a little, but didn't open. Then Jim rubbed his temples with a little brandy, and moistened his lips, and after a while he came to. He knew us alright, and looked up with a smile, and a whispered word of thanks. After some

trouble we got him to take a little nourishment, and he seemed to gain strength a bit.

'But it was clear the end wasn't far off.

'He had no pain; and Jim, who had a good knowledge of bush doctoring, couldn't find any real ailment about him. He was just dying of weakness—dying because he wanted to die; for he begged that we would let him rest till the end came.

'Then Jim took his pocket Bible and was reading some of the great promises Jesus gave to His disciples. But Bill looked troubled, and whispered:

'"Not that. Read . . . though sins . . . scarlet . . . be as snow . . . red . . . as wool . . . This night . . . this night . . . in Paradise."

'Jim followed the hint of the broken words and read the glorious promise of Isaiah, and the Lord's words of pardon to the crucified thief.

'Then we prayed—both of us—in our simple bush fashion, and the dying man whispered his "Amen."

'We sat by him as the setting sun shone on the sick man's bed. Then a strange thing happened. Bill all at once opened his eyes, sat right up, and spoke quite clear and strong like, with no trace of bush talk in it.

'"Ruggy, old man," he said, "I'm going, and I am glad—how glad, perhaps you'll understand when you read something I am going to give you."

'Then he took a paper from under his pillow and gave it to me.

'"For twenty-five years I've only lived for one thing," he went on, "and there's no need for it any longer. You won't understand till you read. Keep to yourself anything that might make any living soul unhappy. The boys have been very kind. They put up with me when I didn't speak, and didn't join in their larks, and wouldn't spend money." Then his face brightened; and he laughed a faint, joyous little laugh. "They didn't know—they didn't know."

'He sank back again on his bunk; and the yellow light of the sunset fell on his face, and—and I tell you, mates.' Here old Ruggy struggled for some moments to get control of his voice, while tears dropped on his grizzled beard. 'I tell you, I know now a bit what it was like when the old Book says that Stephen's face was like the face of an angel.

'His eyes were closed; but his face still bore that heavenly look, and as I bent over him I heard him whisper, "Does she know . . . meet me . . . forgive."

'Then he opened his eyes wide; but he was not looking at us. He called out quite clear-like and strong: "Yes! Mary . . . brother . . ." and with a long shivering sigh, but a face still glowing with more than earthly glory, my poor old mate Botany Bill was gone.

'And now, mates,' old Ruggy continued when he had regained a measure of self-control, 'Mr. Raven here will read you some bits of Bill's story from the paper he gave me. My eyes ain't any too good, especially to read writing. There's a lot in it—especially names and dates, and so on, that our old friend wouldn't like to have made known. I've just cut those parts out; for there are people living who mightn't like to know they have a part in it.'

I shall give the account of Botany Bill as it was read to the club from the MS. placed at my disposal by old Ruggy.

THE STORY

SITTING in the old hut to-night, and feeling my gathering weakness, which can only have one ending, and that soon, an irresistible desire has come over me to leave some record of my ruined life. But why should I write? Not a living soul cares an atom about me; and when presently they find my body in the old hut at Snake Gully, it will only be another worn-out bushman who has crawled away to die, like a wounded animal, alone, uncared for, and unknown. But there, perhaps it may be some satisfaction to myself to crystallize these memories in black-and-white; so why shouldn't I?

Well, my right name is—never mind, I will only write, Arthur. I was a wild scapegrace of a younger son. My brother Rex was only fifteen months older than I, but was a brilliant student, earnest, enthusiastic, and industrious in his work, pure in speech and life—one of the noblest men God ever made. He completed his Cambridge degree with honours, the year I entered.

My father's will had left a comfortable fortune to Rex, and had made ample provision that the trustees should meet the expenses of my learning a

profession—for my father shrewdly judged that the best hope for his wayward younger son's future lay in his having to earn his own living. So it was arranged that I should graduate in arts, take a Cambridge LL.B., and then complete my articles in the office of our old family lawyer—a prominent London solicitor.

It need hardly be said that to one of my disposition these arrangements were not very palatable, and though I had everything I needed, I nursed a rankling sense of injustice in my heart.

By the time I was twenty-two I had somehow got through my 'mods.' at Cambridge, with little study and less care. While I had not absorbed much learning in my college, I had become proficient in its vices. Late hours, drink, gambling, and worse, already stained my record.

Yet through all this time of folly and vice, and inspiring spasmodic efforts at reform, I treasured in my heart the thought of Mary ———, the daughter of my father's business partner. We had been children together; and I had reason to believe that her liking had grown with her years, and was now more than a schoolgirl fancy.

In my better moments how the pure, beautiful face of Mary would seem to look into my den, and make me curse the waste and shame of my life.

I need not go into details of how it happened. In the long 'vac.' following 'Moderations' I had

given way worse than usual; and I had reason to fear that Mary had come to know a good deal about the life I was living.

One day when I was not altogether myself, after a bad night, I met Mary accidentally in a secluded walk near the river. That interview is as vivid to me as if it had occurred only yesterday. In my hot-headed folly, I urged my suit on her, and insisted that she held in her hands the ruin or restoration of my life. I then found how my selfishness and debaucheries had slain her regard for me.

She wept in vast pity for the pain she had to inflict, and the deeper ruin her refusal might hasten; but I saw that her pure soul had been driven in horror from the thought of a union with one so debased.

Then, under the sting of my reproaches, something else emerged which goaded me to madness. I found her heart had been insensibly drawn towards my brother. His high-souled nobility of character had kindled an admiration which soon ripened into love. The knowledge of this, instead of making me grateful that a gem so pure and beautiful should be the prize of one so worthy, only further inflamed my bitterness and resentment, till I hated Rex with a mad hatred.

A year later Rex and Mary were wedded.

I failed in my 'Finals' and left Cambridge in disgust, to plunge further, if possible, into gambling

and vice. I entered the lawyer's office, and made a show of fulfilling my articles, for it was only thus, under the terms of my father's will, that the trustees could permit me to retain my allowance.

The next three years saw very little change in my career; and there was but a slender prospect of my ever being qualified. I had become associated with a group of persons whose names and occupation I need not disclose. One evening we met at a house in a narrow dark street, near the East India Docks, to perfect a project which I shall pass over in silence. I had not seen my brother for some weeks, and altered my London residence to lessen the likelihood of meeting him.

But this evening we had hardly met when, to our dismay, Rex walked into the room. His face did not show a trace of concern, and in his usual open happy way, as if it were the most matter-of-course thing imaginable, asked me to come with him into the street for a minute.

How he came to know of the company I was keeping, or the purpose I had in view, I never knew; but it was evident he knew, and that his knowledge of our scheme rendered it impossible. I was in a vile passion. Rex and his wife had already made every effort that loving interest could suggest to win me from my evil courses; but such attempts had only inflamed my resentment at what I regarded as an interference with my personal liberty.

As we passed the side door of a low public-house, completely shadowed by the angle of a great warehouse, I tried to break away from my brother and enter this dark door. But Rex seized my arm and tried to draw me away with him. In a moment my half-drunken fury and hate boiled over.

'Curse you!' I hissed, 'you robbed me of my father's inheritance, you robbed me of the woman I loved; will you rob me of my freedom to go where I like, and do as I like?'

In my passion I aimed a fearful blow at his face. I had been runner-up for the middle-weight championship at Cambridge, and the blow was a murderous upper cut. It struck him on the point of the chin, shattering the jaw, as I afterwards learned. We were on a high footway, and Rex fell like a log into the road, his head striking the stone pavement.

By a kind of instinct I knew what I had done, and, coward as I was, I ran for my life.

In coming to search for me, Rex had left his watch and all his valuables at home, so the police, finding his pockets empty, concluded he had been garotted and murdered for his money. The crime was attributed to a couple of well-known footpads who were never caught; and another was added to the long list of London's undiscovered crimes.

Nobody suspected me. I had to appear at the funeral, take part in the family gatherings, and

listen while my brother's will was read, which made a generous provision for my future; and all the time a hell of guilt and remorse was burning up my very soul.

Did I say nobody? Only one, *and she knew.* The first time I looked in the face of Mary, I knew her eyes read the secret of my guilty soul. She knew it was my hand that had made her a widow and her two babies orphans.

Months passed, and I had rarely seen Mary. In those months my love for her revived. Not the mad, selfish passion of former days, for I knew she was as far removed from me as Heaven from Tartarus; but something of the love a pagan worshipper might feel for his goddess. And this seemed part of my Nemesis—that I should love with all the intensity of my soul one who could not but hate me as her husband's murderer.

I determined to leave England. Then another folly took possession of me, a passionate craving to hear one kind word, however undeserved, from Mary's lips, and look once on the faces of my brother's little boy and girl, before losing myself in a strange and empty world. This desire became irresistible. Besides, I had fostered the fancy that perhaps, after all, she did not suspect the horrid truth—that it might have been only my guilty dread that had read the meaning into her glance.

I made my way out to the beautiful suburban villa that was still Mary's home. The children were on the lawn—a chubby little lad of nearly three, and a lovely baby girl of fifteen months.

With a shout the little fellow ran to me. 'Un'ca Arfur, Un'ca Arfur, 'oo tum an see Teddy's new gee-gee.'

I clasped little Teddy in my arms—the only being in the world that loved me. How often in the black years following have I felt the clasp of his baby arms, and heard the echo of my name on his lips! I picked up the baby girl from the lawn, and kissed her wee face.

At that moment the door opened, and Mary flew down the garden path. Her eyes were flashing with anger, and she seemed like a royal tigress defending her young from some loathsome wild beast. Yet in the momentary glance I had as she turned fiercely on me, how magnificently beautiful she looked!—the colour burning on her cheeks, her brow and throat like alabaster, and her dark eyes glowing with indignant passion.

I need not repeat her words of scorn and hate, though every syllable and tone burned in like a brand on my guilty soul.

I crept away from her presence like Cain, the first brother-slayer, from the avenging angel of God; and, like Cain, I turned my face to the wilderness knowing that God had set His mark on me.

I came out to New South Wales, changed my name, like many another fugitive and vagabond on the face of the earth has done, and buried myself in the far back country. I readily got employment at bush work, and worked or idled as the mood came on me.

I was utterly hopeless, and had nothing to live for. I dropped all my old wild practices—not on moral grounds, for I regarded myself lost to all moral considerations, but simply because all taste for these gratifications had died out of me. I still received my regular remittance from England, so that I hadn't even the healthy stimulus of a necessity to work. I only worked when the whim took me, and as the months went on I engaged less in healthy occupation, and brooded over the black past and the hopeless future.

I was rapidly losing all hold on life, as I had long ago lost all interest in it, and should soon have dropped, with a sigh of relief, into the grave. Then something happened that changed all this.

Word came to me from my old employers, who had continued to manage the family estate, that the great Glasgow Bank failures had swallowed up every penny of my father's fortune, and that of his former partner, Mary's father. My remittances were, of course, at an end; and my brother's widow and children were left destitute.

I need not say that it was not on my own account

that this news came as a shock. A sentence of death would have been nothing but a welcome boon for a life that was destitute of one ray of hope. But Mary! And little Teddy, who had clasped his chubby arms around my neck, and did not hate me, but had called me 'Un'ca Arfur'! And the little girlie—the wee baby model of Mary herself!

My purpose was soon formed. I wrote to our old lawyer, put him under a pledge of secrecy, told him as much of my relations to my brother's family as I deemed necessary, and got him to give out that a remote relative of Rex had died in South America, and had left to him or his heirs a bequest that would yield a modest competence for a term of years.

Then I took hold of life in earnest. I had something to live for; and never in all these years has the remittance to England been a day late. I prayed daily, almost hourly, if God would count it a prayer, that health and strength might be given me till Mary might no longer need the help, and the children's way in life had become safe.

To disguise my identity more completely, and lessen the risk of Mary ever learning the truth about her husband's unknown relative, I made another move. I had got to know a man commonly called among his mates Botany Bill. He was a convict of the old days—a 'lifer,' who had been set at liberty as a ticket-of-leave man, but could never leave Australia. I found he had a passionate desire

to return to the old land, so I volunteered to take his name and ticket, to report myself periodically to the prison authorities in Sydney, and by fulfilling the terms of his banishment, make possible the poor fellow's escape.

There is not much more I need write. Once in those long years, the old irresistible craving for a word from the woman whose life I had blighted, and for whom I would gladly have died, came over me.

I wrote her a letter, and begged her to let me have a single line from her boy or girl. Three months later the letter came back to me, unopened.

I wonder whether, somewhere or sometime in the great eternity, my sin may be blotted out, and God may let me see, from some far distance—

> . . . those angel faces smile,
> Which I have loved long since and lost—

can it be for ever and ever?

Through all these years I have never had a day's sickness, and seldom needed to look for work. I have dared to believe that this was because of God's care for those in the little cottage in the London suburb—that He was using one of the base things of the world to work out His Fatherly purpose for His loved and lonely ones.

I have only another thing to add. Three months ago word came to me that the wee girlie I had kissed that day on the villa lawn had become the wife of a wealthy American merchant; and that

she was married on the day that Teddy had been made a barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple. The next mail brought other news. Mary, a white-haired, saintly woman, more beautiful, they tell me, than even in the splendour of her youth, had died of a fever, contracted while nursing a waif whom she had taken into her cottage home.

Three months! Is it only so long since the word came which left me nothing in the world to work or live for? Something gave way that day in my heart and brain. I was glad. Sometimes the dread had come over me that I might not last long enough to fulfil my purpose.

I haven't worked since. Why should I? There will be enough in the savings-bank to pay for my funeral and to put up a plain square slab with no name on it—only this:

LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH.

. . . . . .

So ended the story of Botany Bill—as we may still call him.

When Dick Raven had finished reading, there was not a dry eye among the group in Brother Merritt's kitchen; and it was dear old Cephas Merritt himself who whispered with shining eyes:

'Surely the Lord will find a place for Botany Bill alongside the man who would not lift so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner."'

MEMOIRS OF PARRA BURRA

NOTE.

Two or three meetings of the club were occupied in a way different from our usual discussions on passing events.

We were favoured with an extended visit from young Mr. Abell, the manager of Karkarook. He had brought down with him some papers, written at various times on leaves from old diaries, on wrapping paper, and miscellaneous scraps. These had been left by an old man who was at one time a kind of lay missionary to the back-blocks.

He evidently possessed some measure of literary ability, and had begun what he apparently intended to be a more extended story of early religious work on the frontier.

The old man had died at the station, and Mr. Abell with some trouble arranged the fugitive sketches in something like order. Coming to the city to visit his uncle in his illness, and knowing the interest some members of the club take in frontier life, he brought the papers and placed them at our disposal.

They were read by the club with much interest, and are here given under their original title: 'Memoirs of Parra Burra.'

HIS FIRST STATION

'ONE mile down, sir, first turn to the right, then four miles straight on. Chapel one side of the road, and Mr. Brown's on the other. Good-night.'

The mail-driver left the young home missionary under the light of an exceedingly dirty lamp, in front of the village pub. It was 9.30 on a Saturday night in early winter, and the light struggled feebly half-way across the unmade road that formed the village street, but, discouraged in the attempt, lost itself in a labyrinth of mud puddles, whose reflection made the darkness beyond colder and gloomier than ever.

'Five miles—an hour and a quarter—make Brown's by a quarter to eleven,' and the young man's shiny leather handbag and shiny leather leggings disappear in the darkness, with the business-like stride that marks the missionary as something of an athlete, despite his pale, beardless face.

It had rained incessantly for a week, ending up on this particular Saturday with a succession of spiteful sleety showers, like the sputtering infantry

fire of a retreating army. A full moon was overhead, but its light could only so far penetrate the envelope of dense grey cloud as to produce that peculiar luminous darkness that blots out all notion of distance, and makes the lonely traveller feel as if he were the sole inhabitant of a deserted world. Not a star, not a landmark on the dead level plain, not light enough to see the fence on either side of the road; and yet our traveller has a feeling, as he peers through the grey haze, as if he can see a long way, and yet see nothing.

But his surroundings agree with—or is it that they suggest?—his musings. He has been called at a few days' notice by his church to take charge of a difficult station, and he has gone out from his boyhood's home, while yet a boy, to face a task the nature of which he can only dimly comprehend. The people, their spiritual requirements, their modes of thought—can he find the resources to meet the demands that must be made? 'Who is sufficient for these things?' His life's goal is hidden by clouds as dense as those that hide Mr. Brown's hospitable homestead. But is he not plunging into a sin-darkened world to carry a light kindled at Heaven's altar?

> So long Thy power has blest me, sure it still
> Will lead me on,
> O'er moor and fen, o'er——

Splash! gurgle! down to the knee in a crab-hole!

Well, it's only one of the things that break the monotony of the journey. Such was the spirit in which Arthur Hughes, the boy preacher, who had lived in a comfortable town home all his life, went out to take charge of the newly formed Parra Burra Mission.

But where is Brown's? 'Eleven o'clock. I must have come five miles.' But there is no break in the black sky-line and no glimmer of light to suggest a dwelling. Had he taken a wrong turning, or had he been misdirected? If so, there will be nothing for it but to pass the night on that dreary plain. He had not seen a house during his five-mile tramp, and there was not much prospect of finding one later. There is nothing for it but to go on—a useful maxim for the man who regards himself as an interesting victim of religious doubt. A man must follow the best direction he has, even though the road be longer and darker than he thought. Another mile of gluey black clay, variegated with puddles and rivulets of slush. Then, suddenly, as if it had started from the ground, the black gable of a chapel outlines itself against the sombre sky, and at the same moment a glimmer of light across the road spells 'Brown' to the delighted eyes of the home missionary.

He forgets all his shyness and dread of meeting strangers, and it is a very courageous rat-tat that sounds on the farmhouse door.

A welcome that would have delighted one far more fastidious than the wet, draggled, tired, and hungry preacher, makes him at home at once. They have never seen his face before, but is he not a messenger of that gospel which has brightened their long years of obscure toil, bestowed on them the citizenship of another world, in whose intellectual and spiritual atmosphere their higher natures have grown strong? So thoroughly at home is the young preacher that it is with a feeling little short of dismay that he learns during supper that there is a dangerous case of typhoid in the house, that the doctor has absolutely forbidden any stranger to stay there, and that a horseback journey of two miles still lies between him and his night's lodgings! They had expected him early in the day, and had arranged for his accommodation at the nearest neighbour's.

There is now no help for it but that two miles on a strange horse—and he hasn't ridden a horse for ten years. He had known he must learn to ride, an accomplishment more essential to a home missionary than Greek deponents or the massoretic points of Hebrew, but he had not expected his first lesson to be at midnight over two miles of bog.

But another question besides that of keeping in right relationship to his steed troubled the young man's mind during his midnight ride. He had always had an unconquerable aversion to rousing

any one after their retirement to rest. In later years he more than once sheltered in the horses' crib, or barn, after a long night ride, rather than 'knock up' the household. Would Mr. Andrews have retired? It seemed morally certain. In order to meet the needs of a rapidly growing family, the house, which had begun its career as a modest 'lean-to' twenty years before, had sprouted protuberances like an amoeba, but unlike the amoeba, had not experienced multiplication by division. The cluster of rooms grouped higgledy-piggledy around the original lean-to as nucleus made it difficult to find a front door. After making a circuit of the premises the preacher discovers the main entrance—characteristically—at the back. A glance though the window of the great kitchen and dining-room combined, and there, fast asleep by a blazing fire of mallee roots, is the old man, who has kept vigil waiting for the 'praicher' from nine o'clock till one. With a big sigh of relief the home missionary whispers, 'He *has* led me on.'

THE PROPHET'S CHAMBER

A FEW days' exploratory work among the newly-settled farms comprised within the boundaries of the Parra Burra Mission (if it could be said at this stage of its development that the mission possessed any boundaries) convinced Mr. Hughes that he would have to make his head quarters in the then newly-laid-out township of Parra Burra, many miles from the homestead of his friends, the Brown's and Andrews'.

Some years of diligent study in his city home, followed by two years at 'Queen's,' where he had taken a creditable place among the most promising students for the Methodist ministry, had prepared him in a measure for the intellectual side of his life-work. But this training had to be supplemented by other and very different experience.

Although Methodism has often been compelled by the rapid extension of her field of operations, and by lack of trained men, to send out the rawest recruits to the frontier, her aim has always been to give of her best to the sturdy pioneers of the wilderness. Mr. Hughes and others like him who

have since taken foremost places as leaders of Australasian Methodism, have proved that this policy of the Church is the true one, and that, other things being equal, the college and university man makes the best home missionary. But we must look in at the prophet's chamber.

It was not a little chamber on the wall, as the A.V. reads, nor 'a little upper chamber with walls,' as more correctly given elsewhere, but it had the bed and table, and stool and candlestick, albeit the bed was made up on two good-sized drapery cases; the stool was a jam box, and the table was another packing-case, so fixed that the knees of the prophet could go inside of it while he was labouring over 'thirdly' and the application for the coming Sunday.

Parra Burra was designed as a township of no mean pretensions, if one judged by the number of Government pegs to be discovered at the cost of sundry bruises in an evening ramble. These same pegs were prophets also in their way—lying prophets—uttering visions of whole arcades of shops and busy flanked industrial centres, with delightful suburban villas. But the visions never came true—the bruises disappeared in time, and so did the pegs, for the Parra Burra of the future found its location at the railway siding, two miles from where the surveyors had planned it.

Neither had the prophet's own day-dreams come true concerning his 'chamber with walls.' Since

his conversion, and especially since there began to be a talk about his giving himself to the full work of the ministry, he had been occasionally ushered into his own pastor's study. True, he had not had time nor inclination for a very careful examination, for he was generally undergoing a rather trying examination himself; but when he got away and began to ponder it all in his heart he had time to remember the picture of the minister's study—the maps and engravings on the walls, the photograph of the Assembled Conference, the shelves crammed with books, the table covered with more books and papers, and sundry official-looking documents bracketed here and there.

Then he would begin to picture himself seated amid such surroundings, with his pen behind his ear, letting his eyes wander through the window over a sweet little corner of the garden to the green fields beyond, as he built up a soul-stirring discourse for a large and eager congregation in the comfortable church hard by the manse.

Alas! it was a dream. There was only one church in all his large circuit, and that was the packing-case model situated at Brown's. One preaching-place was a woolshed, with the relics of last season's shearing lying about, and a dozen or so of sheep-skins hung up to dry at his right, a few bags of cocky chaff piled up at his left, and six or seven people gathered in front, seated on boxes and

wool bales, and a few dogs snapping at the flies in the distance. At another place he preached in a kitchen and had to stand close to the safe, and it was not necessary to be gifted with second sight to be able to name accurately some of the articles it contained.

How could he expect a manse and a study in a circuit like that? So he had to content himself with the prophet's chamber; only, I say again, it was not on a wall, nor had it walls. It was just a dug-out.

This was a square or oblong hole sunk in the ground, with a stairway cut into one end. The roof was made of pine-poles placed tent fashion. These were covered with boughs, over these straw, and over all the earth that was taken out of the hole.

Where was the cosy study he had dreamed of? Well, he could go on dreaming of it—when he had nothing else to dream about. He had taken up his quarters here of his own free will, too.

When he arrived on the ground, his host, who kept a general store, comprising chiefly sardines, moleskins, and bad tobacco, had put him into a lumber-room, but the tobacco and butter were kept there. It was the firm's office also, and the lady friends of the hostess partook of afternoon tea there. So the prophet could not well get into it in the daytime; and at night, when he did get in, he could not get out, for one door led into the shop, and, as

the preacher was a stranger of whom little was known in those parts, that door was kept locked at night, and the only other door led into the host's bedroom.

After a day or two, therefore, he plucked up courage to crave that he might be allowed to have the dug-out. All that was needed was a sheet of galvanized iron for a door. This was kept in its place with a prop at night; in the day it was discarded altogether.

Here, then, was the Home Missionary of twenty-five years ago, in his study, size eight by ten, and high enough to stand upright in if one stood in the centre. There was just room for the bunk across the back end, and *Watson's Institutes* were quite at home on the natural earth shelf just above.

Decorations? Well, you see, none were really necessary; the walls, as we might as well call the sides of the pit, were a beautiful terra-cotta, and it would have been a pity to disfigure them with paintings or engravings. Still, the monotony was broken here and there with a set of cart harness, a side of bacon, a bundle of tin pannicans, and so on.

If sufficient inspiration could not be drawn from these, there was a bag of sprouting onions in the far corner, and a half a bag of waste potatoes near by, while in the other corner stood a newly-opened barrel of salt fish and a thoroughly matured cheese. Immediately under the rooftree hay-forks and

American house-brooms were neatly packed away, while just overhead depended the inevitable water-bag, containing something that looked like cocoa, but it was not cocoa, and the prophet did not much care to look at it; indeed, he would be very far gone in his cups who would want to hold that beverage up to the light.

This is where Lenny, Collier, Josephus, Mosheim, Butler, and Watson were studied. Sermons had to be made, too. *Stems and Twigs* and *Sermon Outlines* were diligently overhauled. With Cruden's Concordance in hand he would ransack the holy of holies of Scripture in preparation for Sunday, till its streams ran dry, and he would be on the point of declaring that there was not another preachable text left in the Bible. But, somehow, they always turned up in time, till at last there were not Sundays enough for the texts.

The prophet has had better chambers since then, lofty, and light, and beautiful with every convenience, where the sweet fragrance of the spring morning came in through the French window, and the birds sang their song on the sill.

And he has had worse. The kangaroo dog has been hunted out of the idle stripping-machine, and he has been put to bed there with strict orders not to disturb the old hen sitting in the bonnet. He has had to burrow a hole for himself in a heap of cocky chaff, and do his pastoral work next day with

the husks nestling comfortably on his spinal cord. He has slept on the ground, with his saddle for a pillow and his chamber ceiled with the sky. But he has never done better work, nor prepared more effective sermons—whatever else might be said about them—nor held more profitable self-communings, nor had more angel company, nor sweeter talks with God than he had in the eight-by-ten dug-out.

OLD BONES

ONE of the disadvantages of the Australian Home Mission work—often regarded as an advantage by the missionary himself—is the almost invariable change of agent once a year. It seldom happens that the home missionary can harvest the result of his own sowing.

But John Clough, the successor to Mr. Hughes at Parra Burra, though in almost every respect the direct antithesis of the latter, was admirably fitted to build a good superstructure on the sound spiritual foundation laid by the 'boy preacher.'

Clough was a typical son of the soil, with all the power of adaptation and initiative that has made the Australian effective in commerce, on the battlefield, and in the ministry.

. . . . . .

'No, mister, he ain't a beauty at all—not the sort the ladies would be likely to take a fancy to. Yes, it's a pity he ain't got his right allowance of eyes; it sorter interferes with his personal appearance; and I'll allow he wants all his eyes on these 'ere bush roads.'

'Not had the right kind of training?'

'Why, bless you, he can live on nothing and do double work, and if that ain't the kind of training wanted in the Parra Burra mission I don't know what is.' That settled the question, and the verdict of the 'smithy' in the township was that 'he would do.'

Let me hasten to say that it was not the home missionary that was the subject of this dialogue, but the Home Mission horse prospective—a steed that revelled in the classic name of 'Old Bones.' The young home missionary had at last decided to take him 'with all faults and errors of description,' partly perhaps on the recommendation of the cross-country bushman, who 'knew that there 'oss ever since he was a colt,' which statement implied that the bushman himself was approaching the 'sere and yellow leaf,' but more especially because 'Old Bones' was cheap.

The quarterly meeting of the Parra Burra Mission was three months ahead, and when it came it would not overload the exchequer of Mr. Clough, the home missionary. Two or three years of hard training to fit himself for his work in the ministry had taxed to the utmost the narrow resources of a farm in the back-blocks, a farm where rabbits devoured what the drought might spare. So our home missionary was in the not uncommon but very unromantic condition of being hard up, rich

only in a certain loftiness of ideal—that, I fear, sometimes shaped itself into very aerial castles—and in an iron will and sturdy common sense that effectively balanced his day-dreams.

Bones and his master had some things in common. Both were big and strong and angular, and each was a living protest against Hogarth's 'Line of Beauty,' or anything else that suggested rounded figures or flowing curves. Each possessed a temper that the unregenerate might call 'pig-headed,' but which Mr. Clough himself, with commendable modesty, would declare was only 'justifiable firmness.' But Bones was old and hardened, blind in one eye, cynical as to the world and its ways, and generally on the watch to pay out the said world at some unlooked-for moment.

The missionary was young, and behind his two clear grey eyes there burned a suppressed and pure ambition, a mighty love for and hope in humanity, which the strong jaw and straight brows suggested were not likely to evaporate in shadowy dreams and idle longings.

For a week the missionary and his steed had got on fairly well together. A disposition to buck on the first day of their acquaintance had brought to 'Old Bones' the conviction that a greenhide whip in the hand of a muscular bush parson, who had spent his life on a frontier farm, was a thing to be respected. There seemed good reason to believe

that Bones would not attempt any further experiments of that kind.

Fourteen miles away a fencer was lying sick in his hut, with only the attention that his mate, at work in the bush all day, could give—attention as kind and gentle as a woman's, despite the fencer's hard hands and rough Irish brogue. 'Well, Bones, you've got to take me out to Flannagan's camp before dark, so put on your best behaviour, and no tricks,' and Mr. Clough grasped the reins with a hand that was very large and very red, and inserted a by no means elegant foot into the stirrup. Bones went off with a swinging, good-natured canter, evidently meant as a certificate of good character, and proof of the bushman's assurance that 'he didn't know what vice meant—Bones didn't.' His action, if it did not prove him the 'sweetest' of hacks, at least showed him able to carry twelve stone at a good pace.

Five miles passed of bluebush, ironstone gravel, and deep watercourses, and our missionary is going at a swinging trot down an easy slope. Thoughts of the sick man in the lonely bush, and of the folks at home on the old farm, with its warmth of loving comradeship, made the sweeter by mutual struggle and hardship, were curiously blended in the young man's mind. 'How will Jim get on with the —— Stars! What's up!' Bones had chosen a favourable moment for a tremendous 'pig' that

would have shot a greenhorn twenty feet ahead at least. He put his head between his knees apparently searching the stony track for a new Tarcoola, while he let fly a savage kick with both heels, as if the man in the moon had in some way offended his equine dignity. But the missionary was not to be seriously disturbed by an incident like that. With a series of savage bucks for a hundred yards of road 'Old Bones' tried to part company with his owner, who, with set teeth and a half-smile parting his lips, met each buck with a true professional 'swing' until Bones, satisfied with his gymnastic display, broke into a free hand-gallop, and soon deposited his rider at the fencer's camp.

'Faith, y'er riverence, it's meself that's glad to see you—as glad as if Father Murphy himself had come out to see us. Let's hobble your horse, and I'll have a fresh billy of tay riddy in no time. It's Bill ye've come to see? Well, that's rale good av ye. An' it's grateful I am to ye for it. Yer see, Bill (he's my mate, yer riverence, and as good a bhoy as iver lived is Bill)—Well, Bill got on a spree, and then he caught a faver, and got laid up at old Hogan's shanty, and they wouldn't nurse him, the mane divils, and said they was afraid of the fever, and I hadn't got no money, and couldn't give up the job to nurse him; and Bill had spent all his, so I just carried him over here to the camp—he was a bit heavy, and a bit off his head like, but I carried

and rested and carried, and at last got the poor bhoy over here. I just make him some grub, and fasten him in the hut in day time, when I'm at work—yer see he might git away when the bad turns come on—and I look after him at nights. Hard to sit up and do it, yer honer? What do yer take me for? Why, didn't me ould mother read to me about an old Levite or some one, who picked up a poor beggar of a Samaritan, and gave a shanty-keeper feller two bob to look after him for a day or two? Well, p'r'aps I ain't got the story quite right, but anyway, Mick Flannigan isn't the bhoy to go back on his mate.'

Was it any wonder that the missionary, as he drank his tea from a pannican, and made a hearty meal on wallaby steak and damper, murmured, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me.' The garrulous Mick, despite his cheery self-forgetfulness, was evidently worn to the point of exhaustion, and the missionary made him take a much-needed night's sleep, while he took charge of his patient.

During the long night, in many a half-told, broken story, the wasted hand of the bushman lifted the veil from his past, and showed the preacher that within the rough drink-blighted body there was a soul that treasured the remembrance of better things—visions of home, of mother, of sister, and aye, of yet another unnamed, the yet

lingering gleam of sunshine, yea, and too often the despair of the outcast's lot. More vividly than ever before the missionary realized that

> Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
> Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
> Touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness,
> Chords that were broken may vibrate once more.

But it must not be forgotten that 'Old Bones' and not his master is the subject of this chapter. It may help to redeem his character somewhat if I say that on at least one occasion his conduct verged on the prophetic. An elderly preacher had to drive Bones. No doubt this good brother had in his youth, like Peter, rejoiced in being able to go 'whithersoever he would,' but now in his age, he found, like his greater prototype, another would carry him 'whither he would not,' for Bones, taking command of the bit, the trap, and indeed of the whole turnout, including the preacher, 'bolted' a good dozen miles, and only stopped when the appearance of a stable reminded him that a circuit horse has a stomach as well as legs.

Mr. Clough was induced on a few occasions to lend Bones. But one circuit official returned with a broken arm, another minus a set of teeth, and others as living commentaries on a passage that speaks of wounds and bruises, &c. As the population of the circuit was already limited, he deemed it best to allow no further opportunities for the

gratification of Old Bones' homicidal tendencies.

I have already hinted that 'Bones' was not a handsome animal. But if there is any truth in the old saw, 'Handsome is that handsome does,' surely carrying the gospel over thousands of miles of bluebush plain and ironstone hill, generally with little feed and less shelter, with a thermometer sometimes at 40 deg., but more often at 160 deg., will inspire genuine admiration and the fervent wish that his old bones may rest in peace.

'VENGEANCE IS MINE'

JAMES BARSTON, of Dingo Flat, in the extreme eastern corner of the Parra Burra Mission, was a very decent fellow, had a good farm well kept, and a tidy house fairly well furnished, and almost everything you saw on the place was the work of his own hands. He was a single man, but it seemed as if there might be a change in that respect—well, perhaps, after harvest. He was a very acceptable local preacher, and would take a service at an hour's notice. He was the minister's friend, and many a comfortable evening, after service at Dingo Flat, did the Rev. Frank Prescott put in at Jim's. One good thing about Jim was that he had a conscience, and kept it chiefly for his own use. He was on good terms with his neighbours, which is not surprising at all to those who know anything about South Australian farmers.

There was just one slight exception, however, which gives rise to this little story.

O'Grady's lived just across the creek. They were very quiet people, too, except it might be after

a show or a sale, when they took so much water in their whisky at the township that they had to bring home a bottle of the latter to balance matters with. They were good-hearted people, would lend anything they had if one needed it, and in return considered that they were entitled to any portable article you possessed, and would not scruple to ask for the 'lind of your front door' if they wanted such a thing. Jim sometimes wished them a little further.

Now, O'Grady's kept a fine lot of pigs, and Mrs. O'Grady declared she would be 'lonesome widout them.' Jim kept some also, for the matter of that, but his were always shut up. But O'Grady's pigs loved liberty, and would tear and smash till they got it. Next to liberty itself they loved Barston's crop—wheat, barley, oats, anything, but it must be Barston's.

Barston went to head quarters about it, and the reforms were good, but not lasting. He had a long talk with his friend Prescott, and the result was that notices were posted that 'All pigs, dogs, goats, &c., &c., would be destroyed.' But what did the pigs care for a paltry notice? They went snorting over as usual without even stopping to read it. Mrs. O'Grady saw it, but she said it was for Mrs. Davis's 'thavin' turkeys.'

The crops were coming on fine, and the pigs continued to sample them.

Mr. Prescott was planned at the Flat on Sunday night next, and Jim made up his mind that he would have another good consultation with him. Prescott had had a long round that day, and when Barston asked him to come over and stay the night he very gladly accepted. As Jim washed a couple of cups and brewed a jug of cocoa they talked the matter over. The preacher, strange to say, was for shooting. A man could not be expected to stand that sort of thing always. Mere threatening would be taken as a sign of weakness, and they would presume upon his forbearance. If he shot one they would see he meant business, and would ultimately respect him all the more for it. One would be enough, and would in all probability terminate the whole unpleasant matter.

But Jim was not quite so sure. He had never done such a thing before, and did not care to begin now. It would serve them right; but all the same, he did not like doing it. On the whole, they were very good neighbours. He was not sure that it would be the right and Christian thing to do. So nothing was decided after all.

A couple of days after this conversation the crisis came. Barston had been over to the scrub section to do half a day's fence-mending, and returning shortly after noon discovered the pigs abroad as usual. But Jim's eye flashed fiercer than usual, for they had got into his 'Defiance plot,' as he called

it. The fact was that he had been fortunate enough to secure a very small parcel of a celebrated rust-proof wheat, and had sown it grain by grain on a select bit of soil, and had then carefully enclosed it with barbed wire and mallee stakes till he thought it was impregnable. But he did not know O'Grady's pigs. They were as much interested in it as an agricultural bureau, and nothing short of personal inspection would satisfy them. They had now inspected it, and it had evidently met with their approval, for they had practically appropriated the lot.

Barston had been figuring up that he would get nearly a bucket of clean wheat off it. He would have to rub out the ears with his hands and be very careful, but next season he could sow about a quarter of an acre with it, and then his reward would come. But now the whole plan was swept away at one fell swoop by O'Grady's dirty, marauding pigs.

Jim did not stop to reason this time. He just walked into the house and unslung the gun, loaded for wallaby, strode across the yard, down to the bottom end of the barley paddock, and blazed away. Down dropped a good-sized spotted pig, and away scampered all the rest. There was only one charge in the gun, so Jim walked back to the house, hung up the gun, and started to fry some chops for his late dinner.

Meanwhile the storm raged at O'Grady's. They had heard the report. Young Tim said it was over at Barston's, for he had seen the smoke. The balance of the swine soon made their appearance, and Kate, eagerly scanning their ranks, discovered the absence of 'Spot.' At supper time the boys had all come in, and the living-room was the scene of great excitement. The 'praties' were steaming hot on the table by the side of the corned beef, but no one heeded them. Everybody was talking at once.

'Sure, he might have shot owld Rooter, bad cess to him, for he is always into mischief; but to murdher my poor Spot that I reared wid me own hands in granny's owld shawl, and him as good a pig as ever looked a Christian in face, the spalpeen.'

Long Mick sat on the chopping-block by the door muttering, 'This is the man ye call a Christian, and be the same token he was howldin forth over at the church a while ago, and ye'd think butter wouldn't milt in his mouth. If he's a holy Joe, and all the rist of them like him, may the owld boy fly away wid the whole lot.'

Larry's eyes gleamed as he said there was a 'haystack of Jim's over forninst our dam that would make purty burning some dark night, so it would.'

Then the old man's fist came down on the table with a bang that sent the pepper-box flying into

a bowl of milk, and he had opened his mouth for some crowning invectives, when a shadow fell across the doorstep, and Mick was seen to shift from the chopping-block to go and stand with his back to the fire.

In a moment every tongue was still, and every face changed colour, for there stood Jim Barston! Now the chance had come for the row, no one seemed inclined to begin. And as they slyly looked at Jim's face, it did not seem that he had come for a row either. There was a resolute look in his eyes, but there were actually tears on the lids of them; his lips trembled, his hands twitched nervously. At last he spoke—

'Mr. O'Grady, I have shot one of your pigs; they had eaten my sample, and I was angry; I did it without thinking. I only put up the notice to convince you that I was serious about your keeping them home till after harvest. I never meant to shoot them, and I was never so sorry for anything in my life. It was an un-Christian and an unneighbourly act. I have come to beg your pardon and to ask you to accept payment for the pig, and say no more about it.'

So there was no shindy after all. The old man, like a true son of Erin, got up from his place and took Jim's hand, and said with vehemence that he would take a cheque for the pig if Jim would take a cheque for what they had destroyed. Jim would

not, and the old man would not. Jim stayed to supper, and the praties were not very cold after all. The pigs were shut up properly now, and Mick was heard to say subsequently,

'We was all Irish wonst, but we are Methodists now, and it was the spotted pig that did it.'

JAMES McDERMOTT

THINGS had greatly changed since Mr. Clough, the home missionary, and 'Old Bones' first occupied Parra Burra as the centre of their bush mission. Kangaroos no longer looked out from the mallee scrub with their soft wondering eyes at bullock teams 'bogged' in the main street. The kangaroos had long since disappeared, and the scrub, like the grizzled beard of a bushman, had yielded to the demands of civilized society. Rough stores and 'shanties' of galvanized iron or 'wattle-and-dab' had given place to substantial stone buildings. The Imperial Hotel stood on the corner, where formerly, in a mud hut, old Jowler, an ex-Tasmanian convict, used to retail 'snake-juice' whisky to station hands in haste to liquidate their cheques. But whether the character of such establishments had improved as much as their outward appearance is open to grave doubt. Many a bushman who had come to the township with a cheque of £50 or £100 might be found begging his way back to Paralana or Coondambo, after a few days maudlin indulgence at euchre or nap in a back

parlour with the suave landlord of the Imperial. The bush smithy of Joe Bottrill, the sturdy Methodist, had grown to 'Bottrill's Implement Factory,' but Joe was still there, and so was the group of chapel men who, around one of the glowing forges on service nights, usually met for half an hour to discuss the social and religious life of Parra Burra.

The township had already developed several grades of society. It is true that the basis of classification was not strictly uniform, so that some curious instances of overlapping occurred. One class excluded all whose occupation was not of the non-manual kind, and with certain exceptions was fairly embodied in a semi-private tennis club and a monthly select quadrille social; and it looked upon a more or less definite connexion with the local Anglican Church as the 'proper thing.'

This grade had about it a distinct flavour of aristocracy. It included two storekeepers (the other two storekeepers did not keep any assistants; and besides, they were Dissenters, so they were, by tacit consent, relegated to the second grade), a postmaster, three publicans, a mill manager, and half a dozen clerks. There had been some doubt among the young ladies as to whether these latter properly belonged to their 'set'; but, as one was the best tenor singer in Parra Burra, another played tennis divinely, and a third dressed 'just

too lovely for anything,' the point was condescendingly conceded.

A large and not very clearly defined section of the Parra Burra populace was included in the 'middle-class and working people, you know,' with which the select class had as little to do as possible. Outside these was the unclassified mass, the proletariat of a northern frontier town, including some in whose hearts might be read the drama, yea, the tragedy, of human life, as perhaps you would find it in very few other places—if you had but skill and patience to read.

Well, it was the arrival of a new unit to be added to the sum of Parra Burra society that had caused so much stir, question, anxiety, and effort among its heterogeneous elements.

James McDermott had been in the township nearly three months, and so far Parra Burra had failed to classify him. He came as the business manager of Iron, Grubb, & Co., the biggest concern in the district, whose agencies networked North and Western New South Wales, and Southern Queensland as well. It was therefore plain he ought to belong to the select quadrilles and the Anglican Church, especially as rumour said he had learned dancing in Paris. It was true, rumour also said, he had lived a very fast life in Sydney and Melbourne, and it was known that his language, when aroused, would turn a Queensland bullock-driver green with

envy. But the young ladies said it was only a way he had, and, anyhow, if he was awfully wicked, it was better he should be a wicked Churchman than a wicked Dissenter. Mr. McDermott accordingly received special invitations to the select quarterly ball, and also to sing bass in the choir. He accepted neither. But one so eligible could not be let slip without further attempts at capture.

He was invited to all the best drawing-rooms, and seemed not at all adverse to the attentions of an attractive young lady—of any number of them, in fact—but would finish up a night, after Mrs. Fitz-Smith's soiree, by a euchre party at the Imperial with ten drunken teamsters from the Warrigal shearing-sheds. The young men hated him, because he was taller, handsomer, had more money, and had seen more life than any one of them. Business men were compelled, grudgingly, to respect him for his marvellous grasp and promptness in commercial affairs and an amazing capacity for work that made him the envy and despair of all competitors. He had the lifelong respect of all the 'rough push' ever since the day he knocked out Big Dan, the Bully of the North, with a tremendous upper cut under the jaw, because the latter charged him with cheating at poker.

To the little group around Joe Bottrill's forge James McDermott was a sore perplexity. There was a strong feeling among a section of the chapel

people that some special steps should be taken to save him from his evil courses. But old William Jones, who was universally regarded as the theological authority among Parra Burra Methodists, gravely shook his head.

'I do tell 'ee what it es. A man thet do swear like thes here pusson esn't goin' to be convarted queck an' lively, I do knaw. Tedn't fitty to pray fer un, I thenk. 'Tes blasfemmy, that theer swearin'.'

In due course the Sunday-school anniversary at the chapel came round; and to the vast surprise of every one James McDermott was at the morning service!

Such an act by such a person quite assumed the importance of a public event in the life of Parra Burra. Indeed, hardly anything had roused so much general interest since the day when Bill Hawkins won £1,000 by a Tattersall's sweep. For years and years Bill had dropped all his earnings, except enough to buy a little whisky and less food, into the gluttonous maw of Tattersall's. At last his turn came. A couple of months, during which he kept every loafer and deadbeat in Parra Burra crying or fighting drunk, then Bill Hawkins was carried away to the district hospital, to die of exhaustion consequent on delirium tremens.

Sundowners from Northern stations, broken-

down swells and degraded blackfellows, who hung around the four large hotels in Parra Burra, talked affectionately of the days of Bill Hawkins as the 'good old times.'

But this is by the way.

A STARTLING REVOLT

AS James McDermott entered the Parra Burra Methodist Chapel on the morning of the Sunday-school anniversary, although it was within a few minutes of the hour of service, the scene was one of bustle, excitement, and not a little confusion, with but faint suggestion of the sacredness of the day or the surroundings. On a platform that was raised tier above tier nearly to the roof, a large number of boys and girls were scrambling for seats, running up and down and shouting to each other without restraint. Horseplay between two youths in one corner was highly suggestive of a football ground, while a vigorous fight between two urchins in another corner suggested that human nature had not yet quite evaporated in the religious atmosphere of Parra Burra Methodism.

Several teachers made feeble spasmodic efforts to get order, but the superintendent had not yet arrived, and the 'Leader' was busy rummaging among piles of music-books, apparently blissfully unconscious of the hubbub around him.

Presently the superintendent took command. Two or three crying babies of three years of age were passed down to their friends from the highest platform seat. Appeals concerning a smashed hat and a stolen shanghai were listened to, but, I fear, not settled; and after several appeals for quiet—appeals accompanied by the irritating jingling of a small bell—order, sufficient to enable the preacher's voice to be heard, was secured, and the service began. Mr. Baton, the leader, mounted the stand with the air of a man whose opportunity had come. The singing, though marked perhaps by more vigour than taste, was full of harmony, and the fresh, young voices were wafted out on the close summer morning air with a volume of sound that had a certain inspiration in it, in spite of the meaningless doggerel of some of the so-called hymns—strings of phrases about marching for Jesus and homes among the stars—concerning which the only comfort was that no one seemed to pay the slightest heed to the words at all.

The sermon did not call for any special comment. The visiting preacher was a very young probationer, who, in a manner common among young preachers, gave much practical advice to parents from the text, 'Train up a child in the way he should go.' But the preacher evidently felt he was a sort of fifth wheel to the coach, for the people had come to

hear the singing, so his effort was not a very vigorous one.

The one surprising thing about the service was that James McDermott had been there. No one had ever seen him at chapel before, so a knot of men gathered beside the gate after service and discussed the situation. Old William Jones shook his head decidedly.

''Esn't nothin' en et. 'Ull take a braave sarmin to convart he. He do jist coom to 'ear thet there singin'.'

'Don't you think that looks like limiting the grace of God, Brother Jones? I think we ought to have a special prayer-meeting after the evening service if Mr. McDermott comes again to-night. If he got converted, it would be like a brand plucked from the burning, you know'; and John Sleek, the local draper and general storekeeper, gave a little creaking laugh, that always grated unpleasantly on those who heard.

'Besides,' continued John Sleek, 'if we could only get him, what a power his money and ability would be to the cause.'

Honest old Jones gave an uncompromising grunt, for he looked on the ferret-eyed, oily little draper somewhat as the gruff Galilean fisherman, Peter, might be supposed to have looked on Judas Iscariot.

John Sleek, despite a fervid evangelism and an aggressive profession of the 'higher life,' was re-

garded within the Church, and still more outside, as showing a business 'sharpness' that blunt people did not hesitate to call by a harsher name.

Peter Milford, the saintly, simple-minded, illiterate old farmer, whose pure Christian character made him a power in the whole district, and whose wonderful gift of prayer always suggested, even to the most indifferent, the nearness of God, quietly suggested that at least they might specially remember James McDermott in their prayers.

Meanwhile the subject of their discussion had strolled away from the church, with a look on his face that would not have encouraged their hopes.

'A paltry threadbare mockery!' he muttered. 'What did I go for?'

James McDermott's usual light-heartedness had deserted him. He was on bad terms with the world, with himself, and now with the Church. He had had a particularly fast week, lost heavily, drunk heavily, and even his splendid constitution and iron will were suffering the inevitable reaction and *ennui* that are God's ministers of vengeance. Besides, on Saturday night he had had an unpleasant business experience, in which John Sleek was mixed up in rather an ugly way; so, on the whole, James McDermott was having a bad time.

In the evening the church was crammed, and all was stir and expectancy, for it was known that Mr. Baton had reserved his finest 'pieces' for the

evening service. But a special thrill of excitement ran through the congregation when James McDermott, towering above the crowd, squeezed into a corner at the back of the church. Even Brother Jones looked a little less sceptical. The singing was really good, and the sermon, far less conventional than that of the morning, had a ring of gospel fervour that secured more than a bare toleration from the audience—a rare thing in Sunday-school anniversaries.

It was announced that there would be an inquirers' prayer-meeting at the close—an arrangement that met with the evident disfavour of Mr. Baton, for it interfered with an elaborate 'going-out' piece, on which he specially prided himself. The benediction was lost in a general scramble for hats, and a shuffling of feet, admirably suited to dissipate any sacred impressions the service might have made.

Fifteen people remained to the prayer-meeting, and James McDermott was among them! Why he stayed no one could guess, and perhaps least of all he himself. Possibly, in his mood of irritation, the very doing of something contrary to his general habits and inclinations had a kind of grim satisfaction in it.

Peter Milford prayed, and prayed with a fervour and emotion unusual even with him; moreover, the prayer contained some pointed allusions that could not easily be misunderstood.

John Sleek, who always believed in striking while the iron is hot, approached the man sitting in the back seat, with his head bowed on the back of the seat in front.

'My brother, do you realize that you are a sinner, and deserving of hell? Are you prepared to repent, and weep your way to Calvary to-night?'

James McDermott looked up, and gazed straight into the eyes of the little draper, with a look that caused him to shrink slowly back a yard or more.

'You infernal little hypocrite!' The voice was low, but so intense and distinct that it cut through the air like a rapier. 'How dare you come to me with your cant about religion? You, that told me religion was one thing and business another. You, that took from Widow Morris an undated agreement to sell to you her stack of hay at £4 a ton, and refused to let her sell it elsewhere, and left it there till it rotted, because the rise you waited for didn't come.' Then, dropping into Scotch, as he was apt to do when excited, he added, 'If ye kenned yer Bible or yer Burns ye'd ha' learned that an honest man's the noblest work of God.' Then, gripping the draper's shoulder with hand like a steel vice,

'Get ye to yer prayers, an' yer cheating, an' the hell ye ha' threatened me with; and go and tell that poor pious old fool, that has been praying at me for the last ten minutes, that I respect his religion, and wish I were a tenth part as good a

man as he is; but he'd better save his breath for a likelier subject than James McDermott.'

The door banged, and the little company in Parra Burra Chapel looked as if the bottom had dropped out of everything.

JAMES McDERMOTT'S HOME-COMING

THE usual light-hearted self-complacency of the managing partner of Iron, Grubb & Co. had entirely deserted him as he walked with rapid strides down the Parra Burra Creek after that evening service of the Methodist Sunday-school anniversary. Under normal conditions the lovely Australian summer night would have done much to refresh the spirits of James McDermott. He had the soul of an artist, intensely susceptible to external influences. As usual, on those elevated Northern plains, the air, which during the summer day is like the breath of a furnace, had become fresh and cool, almost to sharpness, with a faint gentle movement, hardly to be called wind. The dryness of the climate on these plateaux gives to the atmosphere of a summer night a peculiar exhilarating quality, perhaps not found anywhere else in the world except in Canada during winter, where the frozen air is absolutely free of moisture, and has a similar effect on animal life and spirits, but from an exactly opposite cause. In this clear atmosphere,

under the brilliant light of a moon almost at the full, distant objects were visible almost as distinctly as at midday. Twenty miles away, a spur of the great Flinders Range rose like a rugged black wall; its outline softened by a fringe of mighty gums which showed with marvellous distinctness against the clear sky. But James McDermott was in no mood to sympathize with Nature around him. He finished his cigar with a few savage puffs, and hurled the stump at a pair of initials, enclosed in a heart, carved evidently by a pair of lovers, on the trunk of a giant white gum-tree. He had gambled heavily, drunk more freely than usual, sworn like a Yankee boatswain, and finished up on this particular Sunday night by using words to the hypocritical little draper in the Methodist prayer-meeting against which the blood of his Scottish forbears rose in angry protest. Not that his bitterness of soul bore any of the marks of an orthodox repentance. Very far from that. If he could have ducked John Sleek, the linen-draper, in a horse-pond, or punched the head of good old Peter Milford for 'praying at him,' he would have been able to pass the rest of the night in the back parlour of the Imperial playing nap with the proprietor; and then, after three hours' sound sleep, have gone to his office in the highest spirits. But no such safety-valve for his pent-up annoyance with the world in general and religion in particular was available.

A sharp turn in the creek brought James McDermott in sight of a smouldering fire, flickering with a pale glow in the bright moonlight. Behind the fire, in the shelter and shadow of the high bank, was a rough 'wurlie' of bags and bushes. A hollow cough died away in a groan of pain and weakness as McDermott, stooping nearly double, crept into the wurlie.

'Well, Peter, how are you now, old man? Billy Morris brought you the 'bacca and duff all right?'

'Oh, yaas, boss, he all along brought poor old Black Peter big fellow pudden, plenty 'bacca, eberyting. But, boss, Peter soon all same marloo, him die; cough no stop; sore, very bad, budgeree . . .' A violent fit of coughing stopped the old native's utterance, and left him gasping and exhausted.

Few would have recognized the lion of every Parra Burra drawing-room, whom the young ladies had voted 'just too splendid for anything,' as, with coat and vest thrown on a bush outside, a bag pinned round him for an apron, James McDermott washed the hands and face of the old black, arranged the blankets on the bunk he had himself constructed, and then, without a tremor of repugnance, washed and dressed the hideous running sores that, jointly with consumption—both the product of white 'civilization'—were slowly eating out the black man's life.

'Now, Peter, I've left everything within reach. You'll be all right till to-morrow night. But I'll send Billy along to see how you're getting on, anyhow. But mind, if any one comes, don't tell them about me, or I'll screw your old black neck.'

'Gub-bye, boss, the white man's big-fellow Spirit will be good to you, for all you done for poor no-good old blackfellow.' Was there in the benediction of the poor, degraded native, who had been turned out of the district hospital as loathsome and incurable, an echo of the words of One who said, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these'?

James McDermott lit another cigar and strolled back to his lodgings. He didn't puff quite so savagely now. His act of ministry to one of the most degraded and helpless of human beings had proved a sedative to his disturbed spirit. Besides this he had thought his way through to a conclusion concerning a matter which had troubled him on and off for some days.

'Yes, I think that will do. The firm won't give young Morris a rise for nearly a year, but I will give him an extra ten shillings a week on my own, and Widow Morris won't know but what the firm has done it. She will need it after the way that infernal little scamp Sleek has swindled her. It's the only way I can see to help her a bit.'

He finished his walk in a decidedly better frame of mind, and he didn't play nap that night.

On the Monday was the annual Parra Burra Sunday-school tea. Round two enormous wash-boilers, supported on great stones over a fire of mallee roots, the pillars of the Parra Burra Church were gathered in solemn and anxious discussion. The ferret eyes of John Sleek glistened vindictively, in spite of the unctuous piety of his words, as he protested that a man who swore like a bullock-driver within the very doors of the sanctuary at a brother who spoke to him about his soul, should be counted anathema. To do otherwise would involve the guilt of casting pearls before swine. Didn't Brother Jones think so?

But, strangely enough, honest old Jones, who had previously been of opinion that a man of McDermott's character had sinned beyond redemption, since the scene last night in the chapel, did not seem nearly so sure.

'It do saam to me,' he said, 'from some things I do hear, thet hes hert esn't fur out of the right plaace, after all. Shudn't wonder ef he be a monnyment of God's saaving graace some day'; and saintly old Peter Milford, with a smile on his wrinkled face, nodded, as if he too could believe all things and hope all things.

. . . . . .

Although Parra Burra had made such rapid strides in commercial, social, and municipal affairs, since the days when Mr. Clough, the home mission-

ary, and 'Old Bones' first planted the standard of Methodism there, it had not yet risen to the dignity of an independent circuit. Most of the official and business class coming to the town gave either a real or nominal adherence to the 'Church,' and Methodism, relatively a 'remnant weak and small,' was still ministered to by a humble 'probationer.' This young man, Mr. Crews, had been a silent spectator of the prayer-meeting scene in the chapel; had listened without remark to the discussion round the tea-meeting fire, and generally was more given to thinking and seeing than talking.

Further, his youth and inexperience made him extremely sensitive in approaching men whose educational or other advantages emphasized his own defects. He had always felt a little afraid of James McDermott; but a week after the tea meeting, just at dusk, a timid knock sounded on the door of Mr. McDermott's private room at the Northern Star Hotel, It was Mr. Crews.

Mr. McDermott's sitting-room would have sorely puzzled any one who tried from its contents to determine the character and occupation of its owner. On the table lay a well-worn copy of the Bible, with the paraphrases, in honest Scotch brown leather binding; then in suspicious proximity, *The Strathmores*, by Ouida. A copy of *Burns* with a photo of a sweet old Scotch face in widow's cap, inserted as a bookmark at the 'Cot-

ter's Saturday Night,' was flanked by *Gulliver's Travels*, and a copy of *Faust*, in German. On the wall beneath a beautiful engraving by Doré hung a pair of singlesticks and a set of boxing gloves. A box of groceries, three pairs of children's boots, and a pair of hob-nailed bluchers, occupied the couch, together with a bundle of wrapping paper, evidently intended for parcelling these articles. A blackboard, with a half-obliterated circle and a bewilderment of converging lines, showed unmistakably the remains of a lesson on Euclid's eighth proposition, Book III., while a set of exercise-books in double entry would help to confirm our suspicion that James McDermott had been devoting an hour to his young protégé, William Morris. A dozen Tattersall's sweep tickets stuck in a pipe-rack, a flaring representation of 'Chester,' winner of the 'double' in 1878, and another of a pugilist, with bare body and brutal square jaw, served for the purpose of an overmantel.

As the gentle tap sounded at his door, James McDermott got up looking none too pleased; but he stared in blank amazement when the pale, shy face of Mr. Crews met him on the threshold. Stepping hastily into the passage and closing the door behind him, he inquired courteously of the minister what he could do for him.

'Well, Mr. McDermott, you know I've never been formally introduced to you, and I'm a young fellow

with very little education, ability, or experience, so I've always been shy about seeking your acquaintance. But a sentence I heard from you the other day has encouraged me to come and ask for a few minutes' chat with you.'

The tone was so humble, yet withal had a certain manly earnestness about it, that the merchant said:

'Certainly; and if you don't mind we'll walk down the road together.'

Mr. McDermott knew well that it must have cost the young minister a great effort to have sought the interview; and with the ready tact of the experienced man of the world, he chatted pleasantly during their short walk through the main street, to the outskirts of the town. When they were quite beyond risk of interruption, Mr. Crews plunged into the subject uppermost in his mind.

'I heard you say, sir, in that prayer-meeting, "If ye knew your Bible and your *Burns*, ye'd ha' kenned an honest man's the noblest work of God." Well, sir, I do want to be honest, and that's my excuse for intruding on you. First of all, I want to thank you for what you said to John Sleek that night. No, not just that; I mean for the feeling that made you do it—a good man's indignation—I know you are a good man, although you swear—a good man's indignation against a man who devours widows' houses, and for a pretence makes long

prayers. I do not want to discuss John Sleek's character or conduct—you know probably more about both than I do—and perhaps I've already said more than I ought concerning that; but I want to say "God bless you" for your care of old Black Peter and a lot of others.

'No, sir, don't be angry. They haven't told me —not a word; but I can't help getting to know some things. Then, sir, just one other word. You would demand that I be as honest in my life-business as you are in yours; and I believe my Master has told me to say this—Will you try to be as honest and dutiful and loving to the great All-Father as you are to your poor fellow creatures? Sir, you are wiser and cleverer than I am, but I venture with all deference to press on you your own text, "An honest man's the noblest work of God." I think that is all I ought to say. Again, pray pardon my intrusion. Good night, sir.'

'Stay!' and the great hand of James McDermott fastened on the young preacher's shoulder with an energy that rendered his command quite unnecessary.

'Look here, my boy, it's true I've seen more of the world than you. Seen it, tasted it, incorporated its deepest devilry into my being. Look! I've gambled, drunk, sworn, blasphemed, and denied the very name and existence of God. Ugh! there's a yet fouler chapter of iniquity that it would only

make me more contemptible were I to shock and sully your soul by reciting it. No. I thank you for your honest words, I do indeed; you haven't spoken to me like a canting Pharisee. You've made the kind of plea that I think would weigh with me more than any other that man could utter—the obligation to be as true and straight with Almighty God as I would expect to be with my fellow men. But that's just where the helplessness of the case becomes manifest. I tell you, I've too much respect for God—if there is a God, and I think there must be—to sneak into His presence and ask Him to let me off after I've played the devil with every power He has given me. I should be either a coward or an impudent knave, and God doesn't want either. No; excuse me, I don't want you to say any more. I say again, I shall always thank you and respect you for your earnest, manly words. Let me just add this—If there's any poor wretch you are trying to save, and a little money will help, come and ask for it. Now, good-night.'

Mr. Crews went home sadly crestfallen. How poorly he had represented his Master! What conclusive arguments, what passages of Scripture flashed like living light into his mind, now that the chance of using them was gone! And it was with a very chastened spirit he knelt and prayed for the man to whom his soul went out with a great love.

Mr. McDermott returned to his rooms in a very disturbed condition of mind. He did not fear hell, he did not crave for heaven, he did not love God, he did not believe in religion; at least he told himself these things with suspicious reiteration; but 'Be honest with God!' It had a business ring about it, and business integrity had always been his idol. Was he, James McDermott, a fraud after all? Was he embezzling God's property?

Next morning the chief clerk of Iron, Grubb & Co. received a note stating that Mr. McDermott, on account of pressing private business, would not be at the office that day; nor did he appear the next. On Thursday, the black hearse of Mr. Solemn, the local undertaker, crept slowly up the hill from Parra Burra Creek to the cemetery; and James McDermott alone walked behind all that was mortal of old Black Peter.

Mr. Crews had merely received a message that a funeral from outside the town would arrive at the cemetery at 3 p.m., and a request he would meet it there.

As they turned away from the grave, McDermott took the hand of the minister with a look on his face it had never worn before; and he repeated the words written on the black plate of the coffin, 'The white man's big-fellow Spirit has been very good.'

No one ever knew precisely what had passed in the merchant's sitting-room during those two days

and nights; but where 'Chester' and the pugilist used to be, there hangs a beautifully illuminated legend, 'An honest man's the noblest work of God.'

Here the Memoirs of Parra Burra broke off abruptly, leaving the club, which had passed three evenings in an interested perusal of them, tantalized by an unsatisfied desire to know more of McDermott and the pillars of Parra Burra Church.

CHILDREN OF NATURE

FROM THE BACK-BLOCKS

I HAVE to confess that at one time I had but slender sympathy with the operations of the Home Mission Society. I looked with much suspicion on the policy of spending large sums of money on the sparsely populated frontier, particularly when that expense involved sacrifice and financial embarrassment to many a struggling Society in the more settled districts. My business happened to make me a resident for some time in a distant township—one of those settlements that lie on the borderline between the outer agricultural areas and the 'way back' country where townships are practically unknown. Here I had a fairly extended and intimate acquaintance with the principal persons mentioned in this incident, and am able from my journal to give its details almost at first hand. If my view as to the obligations of the Methodist Church to Home Missions has undergone a change, it is largely due to this and similar episodes of frontier life that have come under my personal observation.

Since the railway had passed through Boobowie township it had become quite accustomed to being the point of contact between nineteenth-century civilization and the far nor'-east country; hence the arrival of Bill King's bullock team with a new family from 'way back,' together with all their household treasures, only created a mild and passing interest.

As the bullock dray pulled up (if that rather deliberate mode of locomotion may be said to pull up) at the door of the three-roomed iron lean-to which was henceforth to claim Tom Lander as tenant and lord, the latter strode around the tail of the dray, and through the open door, without offering to assist his wife in descending from her somewhat precarious perch on top of the furniture. But Sally Lander betrayed no resentment at her husband's lack of gallantry, as she clambered, with perfect self-possession, over the wheel to the ground. A lanky girl of fifteen followed her mother's example with even greater *sang-froid*; a boy of ten was already exploring the limited interior of the domicile, and two little urchins of six and four, together with two dogs and a 'joey' bandicoot, disentangled themselves from the intricacies of the loading.

In a couple of days as much of the household goods as the three iron rooms would hold was stowed inside, and the family had settled down as permanent residents of Boobowie.

On Thursday afternoon Tom Lander returned from a lounge at the railway station (he was not to commence work as drayman for the local store-keeper till next week) with an uneasy look on his face.

'Look, Sally: you remember Dave Morgan, him whose mother used to keep the eating-house at Nobby Peter's Crossing? Well, I met Dave. He runs a farm a mile or two out. Well, he jist shook me up awful. Lets on that the old way of life, like we've been used to back on old Moses Levi's station, won't tally with decent people down these parts nohow. Then he's got awful notions about some settling time, when every blessed one of us is called to square accounts. S'far's I can make out, Dave he goes reg'lar to a sort of muster they hold. They've got a parson chap all to themselves, and they expect to git fixed up proper so's it'll be all right when they put in their checks. Dave sorter invited me to go to the meeting. I feel a bit shook about it, but I ain't goin' to let on to all the chaps here that I've never seen nothing, and can't tally up to the rest. So look here, Sally; guess we'd better go and hear what the parson and them coves have got to say about it.'

Sally had never heard her lord make a speech of that length at one time before, and it was evidence of the way Dave Morgan's statements had agitated him.

A long and anxious discussion, in which Susie, their eldest born, took a full share, followed on Tom's suggestion to attend the meeting-house that evening. But Sally at length said,

'I don't think I can go to-night, Tom, nohow. There's a lot to do, and I can't leave the children, and everything strange, too. You go. Put your best clothes on, like you've always been used to goin' to meetings, and don't let on yer ain't used to it, and just do like the other chaps does; then tell us what's it's like, and I'll see about goin' Sunday.'

Tom didn't half like facing this strange experience alone, but the influence Dave Morgan had brought to bear on his mind was too strong to be ignored. However, he took an uncompromising stand against putting on his best clothes except on Sunday. These had been specially selected and bought from an Afghan hawker back on old Levi's run, in view of the demands of the 'town Sunday' and the standard of respectability it was supposed to require. Besides, he had never worn a coat on a weekday in his life, and such a reversal of all established usage could not come all at once. With bare arms and open shirt that displayed a segment of copper-coloured skin, but with a flaring blue and yellow silk handkerchief about his neck, which he consented to wear as a compromise, Tom Lander sallied forth to find the Methodist meeting-house. Three times his heart failed him, and he

slunk past the door instead of entering. Then, with a kind of nervous plunge, he dived through the door, tripping over the step, and floundering into a seat, and in his excitement forgetting to take the new 'billycock' hat from his head.

Beyond a momentary start at the bushman's unceremonious entrance, not much notice was taken of Tom's presence during the service. It was no uncommon thing for idlers about the little railway township, or straggling bushmen who had 'knocked down their cheques,' to stray into the week-evening meeting. For the most part such visitors soon got tired of the singing and praying, or, disturbed by an increasing thirst, cleared out to seek more congenial company at the pub. a little farther up the street, whose smoky yellow light seemed to blink obliquely with a tipsy sort of leer in the face of the little chapel across the way. But no idle onlooker at a stale pageant, no drowsy listener to a thrice-told tale, was this rugged child of the wilderness, whose great hairy hands grasped the seat-back as though all the world was falling to pieces about him. Like a man in a dream he returned home to give his wife an account of the service.

In the meantime, Sally waited with some anxiety for her husband's return. The strange effect of Dave Morgan's conversation on Tom had greatly disturbed her own feelings. The conviction that there was another world, unseen but real, that its

interests were near and of vast importance to themselves, had already taken root in Sally's mind; and the spiritual nature strong in every woman, however sordid and earthbound her life, was being roused into activity.

About nine o'clock Tom strode into his cottage. His stumpy black clay pipe was not between his teeth. Sally had never before seen him in an unoccupied moment without his pipe; and it was evidence that something extraordinary had filled his mind on the way home.

She did not utter a word of inquiry as Tom dropped into a seat at the table, but sat opposite waiting for the momentous revelation he had to unfold.

'I'd better try to tell you about it from the start,' he said at last, 'I got into the meeting a bit late; yer see, I felt like I was having to make a lead, with no sorter notion what cards was out; and I hung round some before I could start right in. Then they was singing. I tell you, my girl, I never heard nothin' like it. It beats any singsong I ever heard at old Moses Levi's shearin'-shed hollow. It was that real like's if they meant every word of it. Then the parson chap—a slim, pale-faced young chap he is; but with a tough, determined look about him as if he meant things—well, he read summat, and stopped now and then to tell us what it was about. The yarn seemed to consarn a

young fellow what got too big for his clothes, so to speak. He got impatient and didn't want to wait till the old man died, so he up and asks him straight out to deal him his share, and he'd go and make his pile in furrin parts. And his father did it. P'r'aps he reckoned he warn't no good round the farm with such notions on him. Anyhow, he paid him down the money, and off he went—down Melbourne way, I think it was. He soon took up with a fast lot, and knocked down his cheque in almost no time, paintin' things red, in this 'ere city. They cleaned him right out, till he hadn't a copper to buy grub, and hardly a rag on him, and he'd got the shakes that bad after his spree he warn't fit for nothin'.'

'An' serve him right, too,' Sally broke in; 'I never had no patience with men a-gettin' on the spree that way. And him to leave the old man too in that dirty fashion. But, go on, Tom, how did he get on?'

'Well, he couldn't get a job nowhere about town, and all the flash lot cut him dead. They turned up their noses, and wouldn't offer him a nobbler or a feed. At last he cleared out of town, and went to look for a job. He got a billet at last to mind pigs for some hard old skinflint. So there he was—ragged, and cold, and starvin', mindin' them pigs. I can't quite make it out; don't seem it was in this country, after all, now I come to think, for the parson giv' us to understand that it was the lowest-down billet

going—kinder wicked, in fact—to have anything to do with pigs. Anyways, things got so desprit with this Prodigal, the preacher called him—that he come down to sneakin' the grub what belonged to the pigs.'

'Good enough for him, too,' Sally interjected. She had not got over her indignation at the young man's unfilial conduct.

'Yes, well, I feel a bit that way, too; but the queerest thing is to come. That there taste of the pig's feed seemed to bring him to his senses. He resolved to give up the job, and tramp every inch back to the old farm, and ask the old man to give him a low-down billet of some sort, and he'd never let on he was any sort of a relation, or ast for anything better. Well, one day sure enough, he turned up in sight of the old home; and when he turned the corner of the track, p'r'aps a mile or more away, if his father didn't see him and know him, first lick!'

Sally was listening with breathless interest. 'Didn't the old man set the dogs on him?' she broke in. 'Think of the cheek of him tryin' to work his way back like that.'

'No, Sally, it warn't like that a bit. He ran down to meet him, lugged him in, and set every one goin' to get him the most slap-up dinner you ever see; fixed him up in a new rig-out, and called up all hands for a half holiday and a big dance to celebrate him coming back.

Sally shook her head and looked very dubious over this turn of the narrative.

'But, Sally, it's what follows has broke me up pretty bad. The preacher made out as how God put this here account I've given you in the Book—His own Book, God's Book, you understand—to make us see that we're jist that young scamp of a son over again. That we go and do everything dead agin Him, the Father—that's God—all of our own stupid pride and wickedness. Then, when we come to see what low-down, good-for-nothing dead-beats we are—when the devil hasn't got nothing but pig-feed for us, and won't give us that, then, if we come to our senses, and go to Him and ast Him to forgive us, He jist makes it all up and treats us 's if we'd never done nothin' wrong. And all this, so the preacher said, was because God's own Son—Jesus, you understand—come down, and give His own life, so's we might know how God felt about us. An', do you believe it, when this 'ere Jesus come, all lovin' and kind like, and doing good to everybody, if the wretches didn't go and kill him—they drove spikes through His hands and feet into two pieces of wood; then the brutes stuck Him up, and left Him to die.'

'But, Tom'—Sally's eyes were shining, and her chin full of little quivering puckers. 'Oh, Tom, you don't mean that that's all dead true—that it ain't no storybook yarn, but all real fact.'

'True as true, Sally. And he said if it warn' for Him a-dying like that there wouldn't ever have been no ghost of a show for us getting back home again to God—to the good Father, you know.

'Well,' Tom continued, 'I got thinking hard about all this, and feeling awful miserable, and I missed a lot more the preacher chap said. Then he shut his eyes, and began to pray. But it was just like as if God and Jesus was there. And he just asked Jesus to come to everybody what was wicked and miserable like, and fill them with goodness and joy.'

'But I thought you said, Tom, that Jesus was dead—murdered. Ain't it Him what they nailed up and let die?'

'Yes, Sally; there's something I can't make out. Yer see, a poor chap like me can't pick it up all at wonst. But He's alive—I'm sartin about that—for the preacher talked that homely like to Him—and so did some of the others. And, Sally'—Tom's voice dropped almost to a whisper—'I seemed to feel as if there was some one there I couldn't see.'

'Oh, Tom'—and Sally put her hand timidly on Tom's great hairy fist (outward signs of tenderness were not very common between these two), 'Oh, Tom, perhaps if we tried we might get to know the good Father and Jesus, and talk to Him like the preacher lad. But, oh, Tom, I feel wicked and

. . . and . . .' The poor little woman broke down and sobbed.

There was a long pause, ending with a suspicious snuffling kind of grunt from Tom before the latter managed to say,

'Well, Sally, my girl, p'r'aps we may, p'r'aps we may. Anyhow, we'll try. And maybe the Father will see us, even if we're a long way off.'

VIRGIN SOIL

NOT much was seen of Tom Lander during the rest of that week. A new and profoundly interesting occupation filled every moment he and Sally could spare. At the far distant station of Woolgipena, where both had been born and reared, there was a half-time provisional school, and both had learned to read just a little—Sally, in the time that could be spared from the drudgery of the eldest girl's lot in the boundary-rider's home; and Tom, in the brief periods of comparative diligence that followed severe thrashings for truancy and other schoolboy delinquencies. For the boy was a typical specimen of the back-blocks youth—vastly more interested in cattle-mustering and colt-breaking, and in the splendid excitement of shearing-time, than in the irksome toil of book-learning. Eighteen years ago the pair had journeyed to Port Augusta to be married. Neither of them had ever been in a town before, and immediately the ceremony was through they had started off for the far Nor'-East as a 'married couple' engaged for old Moses Levi's station.

They had never owned a Bible, and probably had never read or heard a dozen sentences from one in their lives.

Long into the night they had talked over Tom's experiences in the Thursday evening service.

'See, Sally, we must git a Bible fust thing. Don't seem no one can follow this ere trail nohow, only except he can read it at fust hand. "God's own guide-book to heaven," the preacher chap called it. Now, I shouldn't wonder, Sally, if it's all that clear and straightforward that we'll git on the home track right away. Guess that young feller, the prodigal, you know, if he had any say in making up the book, took care to blaze the track proper, so that poor coves like me, what never had no learnin', so to speak, might strike it at wonst, and get fair going for the head station. Anyway, we must git a Bible fust thing.'

Before Reuben Sharp had taken down his shutters next morning, Tom strode into the store, looking very awkward and shamefaced, but very determined. The purchase of the Book was a long and serious affair. It was difficult to convince Tom that the neat little Bibles bound in curtained morocco had the same contents as the ponderous Family Bible, with brass clasps and the flaring blue and red pictures—Tom had a strong leaning to those pictures, and hesitated long. But at length he compromised by taking a bulky, well-bound book

in plain brown calf, after a positive assurance from Reuben that 'it was all there,' and 'wasn't just got up a bit smaller than the others to sell.'

'Where do you think we'd best begin, Tom?' asked Sally, looking with infinite admiration, and a tinge of superstitious awe, at the great Book. 'Where does the story come in about that chap as served his father such a dirty trick?'

Tom shook his head.

'Seems to me, Sally, the only way to git the hang of this 'ere thing is jist to begin at the fust, and go right through. It's an awful lot'—and Tom, with a dubious look, ran the great thickness of pages through his fingers. 'It's an awful lot—and some of this 'ere reading looks dreadful hard—big words, like I've never heard of, certain—but that's our deal, Sally; begin proper and go right through.'

Throughout that day and the next, except when their simple household needs demanded Sally's care, the two sat side by side at their unaccustomed task. Tom was a little the better reader, and mostly read aloud, his great stumpy finger following the lines, and jammed down hard at any word which had to be laboriously spelled out, and the meaning discussed before going on.

True to Tom's determination they began at the beginning, 'To the most high and mighty Prince, James,' &c., and right on through the pompous

flattery of the dedication by the translators of 1611. Then on through the great prose-poem of the creation, with its solemn majesty and sweet simplicity. Their reading was very slow, and broken by long discussions as to the meaning of words, for Tom was very unwilling to go on until they could come to some tentative understanding of the difficulties they met. They encountered much that surprised and puzzled them; but one determining principle, the true product of an earnest spirit, guided as a pole-star their search. They searched the Scriptures to learn man's relation to God. How much the misguided destructive critic would be saved from by adopting the critical apparatus of Tom and Sally!

By Saturday night they were through Genesis, their hearts stirred to a wondering rapture, a vague, half-understood delight, by its lovely pastorals, its thrilling battle-songs, its passion for righteousness, and, above all, its living portraiture of Jehovah. Tom had hit off each Bible character in his own picturesque bush vernacular by an appropriate epithet. Abraham's lying and Noah's drunkenness had been great disappointments, and the ingratitude and selfishness of Lot in 'grabbin' the best cattle-run for himself, and leavin' Abraham the rough hills, all ironstone and fuzz, and his sheep a rubbin' the skin off their noses on the rocks and gravel' had kindled his fiercest indignation. He had been

swearing volubly for fully three minutes before it occurred either to Sally or himself that there was anything inappropriate in this exercise.

'Don't you think, Tom, it's kinder wicked to go on like that?' Sally broke in. 'Didn't the preacher say you'd have to give up all that if you was to git back agin to the Father?'

Tom was nonplussed.

'But, Sally, look at all Abram had done for that sneaking — —.' And Tom was going off again in a string of expletives, when Sally's look of distress stopped him. 'All right, old girl. I do want to take it out of this young cub; but I'll try not to say anything that ain't respectable. It's hard, though, jolly hard.' And Tom sighed resignedly, and went on with his reading.

The early chapters of Exodus were of absorbing interest. Almost every verse, like a panorama of a strange landscape, brought some startling and fascinating change of scene. Tom ground his teeth with rage at the murderous decree of Pharaoh.

'Jist think of that unfeeling brute having all the little boy babies'—and Tom's voice broke, with a little hoarse catch in the throat—'babies like our own poor little chap, Sally, what we buried under the old Mulga back at Levi's; havin' them all drownded like kittens in that there river. Why, he wasn't human; he hadn't the feelin's of a she-dingo —he hadn't.' But when he came to the story of

the way in which the quick-witted Hebrew mothers check-mated their clumsy enemies, the revulsion of feeling made him fairly shout for joy. It was late when the Book was reluctantly laid aside. I dare not put into cold print the short prayer Tom uttered as the pair knelt together in their lowly cabin. To other ears it might sound ignorant and irreverent, but I think the Father heard.

'I do believe we shall git right home to the Father to-morrow, Sally. Do you know, it seems 'sif He warnt far off now. We're trying to git back outer the furrin country, and He'll be on the look-out for us at the chapel, sartin sure.'

With this sweet expectance they went to rest; but Tom and his wife were to have some dark hours before the welcome home of the Father filled their souls with joy and peace.

Tom and Sally woke on the Sunday morning with an almost oppressive sense of the importance of the occasion. The vivid imagery of the return of the prodigal son, the going out of Abram from the carnal surroundings of Mesopotamia, and the sharp surgery by which Israel had been separated from the pagan body politic of Egypt—these were the material from which they had constructed their ideas of the separateness of Christians. The only living examples Tom Lander had yet met of the professedly religious man were his old friend Dave Morgan and the young 'preacher chap,' and the

words of both had tended to strengthen the conviction that all religious people must be very sharply marked off in character and conduct from ordinary beings.

It took all the morning to prepare the household for the momentous event of their first church-going. But it was not with any tinge of personal pride, but solely from the feeling that the inauguration of an absolutely new mode of life needed to be fittingly recognized in their dress and deportment, that, with much discussion and laborious co-operation, they rigged in their Sunday best.

At last the spoils of the Afghan hawker's van were satisfactorily adjusted.

Tom wore a pair of corduroys with immense bell bottoms, and a blue linen shirt. The gleaming white linen collar, after a struggle in which Tom, Sally, and their eldest girl all engaged, at the imminent danger of strangling the victim, had to be discarded. It would not meet by an inch and a half round Tom's capacious throat. A brown velvet vest, cut low; the blue-and-yellow silk handkerchief round his neck; and a beaufort coat, of ample length, but insufficient girth, completed Tom Lander's outfit. This particular cut of coat was peculiarly ill-suited to Tom's burly proportions. The top button was fastened with difficulty across his great chest, while the others positively refused to meet, giving a peculiar 'iked-up' appearance,

not improved in profile by an immense red cotton handkerchief being stuffed in the tail pocket.

Sally's costume consisted of a dark-yellowish skirt, surmounted by a pale blue blouse, and her outfit was completed by a black hat, trimmed with red roses. This latter presented the flabby appearance generally associated with back-blocks millinery. But the little woman was quite unconscious of discord of colour, or the dejected flopping of her roses.

Susie, the eldest girl, was of an age and stature that might have been the despair of much more skilled dressers than poor Mrs. Lander. A hat much too small for her broad, homely face; a skirt, very short in front, but seeking to make amends by drooping in a woebegone fashion behind, gave Susie something the appearance of a rooster caught in a spring shower.

Harry, the twelve-year-old boy, was passably dressed, except that his pants were of that indeterminate type, too long for 'knickers' and too short for 'longs,' hanging straight, like elongated jam tins, midway between his knees and ankles.

But no thought of their grotesque appearance crossed the minds of our friends as they entered the chapel that Sunday morning. Were they not about to meet the 'welcome home' of the Great Father, and join those who, on pilgrimage to Canaan, had left the Egypt of the world far behind?

The back seats of the half-filled chapel were occupied, so Tom strode halfway down, lugging forward little unwilling Tommy, who had strong objections to the whole proceedings, particularly to leaving behind his joey bandicoot.

They had not been seated many minutes when Sally became conscious that they were receiving undue attention from their fellow worshippers. A girl of sixteen, two seats in front, looked round, then whispered to her companion. Both turned and stared at the newcomers, then giggled. Another look, and a sputtering, half-suppressed laugh, turned all eyes on the Lander pew.

Sally fidgetted uneasily, and reddened; and the roses bobbed and drooped more disconsolately than ever. But, so far, Tom had no eyes nor ears for these things. He knew nothing of the exigencies of circuit appointments, and expected to see the 'preacher chap' of Thursday night at the little desk. But, instead, Reuben Sharp, his future employer, stood up and gave out the hymn, 'When I survey the wondrous cross.' How the words of the penitent's hymn thrilled Tom Lander's soul! and his great bass voice rolled out in blended prayer and praise, oblivious of all else. Right on to the glorious climax—

> Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
> That were a present far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my life, my . . .

Could Tom believe his eyes? There, in the front row of the choir, with the very words of absolute consecration on their lips, the two 'leading sopranos' broke off to chatter behind their hymn-books, a giggling laugh outlasting the final note of the hymn. Again and again during the service similar frivolous conduct fell like a cold douche on Tom's ardent spirit. He could not understand it. Surely these people knew the Heavenly Father, or why did they come to worship? Besides, were they not the recognized leaders of the divine service of praise?

Tom listened to the reading of the Scripture with profound interest. Reuben Sharp was a good reader, and, as he read the majestic fifty-second chapter of Isaiah, Tom almost forgot the choir and their trifling, although the leader occupied the reading-time in rummaging among a pile of dilapidated music and in a *sotto voce* discussion with the organist.

When the sermon began, Tom banished all other thoughts, and braced himself to listen with all-absorbing expectancy. It was a sad disappointment. Mr. Sharp's subject was the ten-horned beast of Daniel, and his sermon consisted of an abstruse but not very convincing argument that the 'one notable horn represented the Roman Catholic Church. No one seemed particularly concerned with the preacher's 'identifications,' and

what still more depressed Tom was that the preacher himself did not seem to expect that they would be, but took their yawning indifference as a matter of course.

No one spoke to the strangers in the queer garb as they emerged from the chapel; but it could by no means be said that they passed unnoticed.

Safe within the shelter of their own cottage, their annoyance and disappointment found vent. Mrs. Lander was evidently deeply incensed and dejected. The simple little woman had caught an enthusiasm scarcely less intense than her husband's, and her keener womanly sensibilities rendered the affront and disillusion, and the consequent revulsion of feeling, more distressing. Susie was fiercely indignant.

'Them two gels in front did nothing but look at you and dad all the time, and snigger. Wish I cud have 'em here jist a spell. I'd give 'em som'ink to laugh at.' And Susie, in her indignation, looked almost handsome, despite her lanky figure and ill-fitting gown.

'It ain't no use goin' on that way, Susie, girl,' Tom remonstrated. 'You see, maybe, they ain't had no chances, and don't know no better. Wonst, I remember, back at Woolgipena, when I was a young chap, I got on to a feller bad for makin' a fool of hisself at a sing-song what we'd got up. I dressed him down sarcastic like, and offered to

oblige him by punchin' his head, if he had any leanin's that way. Then the ringer come up, and he ses, ses he, "Don't be a fool, Tom; that there chap is a hidjit, and can't help it." Well, yer see, I've been awful careful about gettin' riled with folks since then.'

The afternoon was devoted to careful reading in the big brown Bible. The Book of Exodus, with its stories of devotion and decline, of conquest and failure, of human weakness and sin, and of divine strength and pity, enthralled their souls, and made them almost forget their experiences of the morning.

It was after dark when the little group made their way again to the chapel, with hope and expectancy restored, in anticipation of the evening service.

THE RENTED PEW

THERE were only a few persons scattered among the pews of the dimly-lighted chapel when Tom Lander and his family entered on the Sunday evening, and as others arrived the queer attire of the back-blockers did not seem to attract any special notice in the semi-darkness. The home missionary, or 'preacher chap,' as Tom called him, looked jaded, and his voice, as he gave out the first hymn, lacked the ring of triumphant gladness that had thrilled Tom's heart in the Thursday evening service.

John Warren, of the Boobowie Home Mission Station, had ridden forty miles that day, preached twice, and conducted a Sunday-school. This, though a fair day's work, would not have accounted for the dispirited tone and manner of the young missionary. He had had what preachers call a bad time in his services, and had, besides, encountered more than the usual number of pinpricks in the way of fault-finding from not over-sympathetic officials. In one place the inability of the minister to secure, for their Sunday-school anniversary, a

neighbouring preacher whose presence had been anticipated as a special 'draw,' was made the occasion of some pointed remarks to the effect that Mr. Warren's predecessor had always been popular enough in other pulpits to be able to secure such exchanges when desired. At the close of his afternoon service the unlucky preacher had been *reminded*—though it was the first he had heard of it—that twice that quarter local preachers planned there had disappointed the congregation. It is true the delinquent brethren lived over ten miles from Mr. Warren's head quarters, but it was evident that in some mysterious way the home missionary was deemed responsible for their failure. He had reached Boobowie too late to have tea and had hurried at once to the chapel. At the door the chapel steward met him with the information that Mr. Small, one of their best supporters, had given up his sittings because three of his children had been down with measles for a week, and the minister had not visited the house. The fact that the Smalls lived three miles out, and no one had deemed it worth while to inform the preacher, did not lessen the chapel steward's tartness nor the young minister's feeling of discouragement.

Thus it was that, with a depressing sense of failure, Mr. Warren faced his principal congregation on this particular Sunday evening. What a

change it would have made had he known that in the burly bushman near the front and the meek little woman with the preposterous headgear at his side were at least two souls hungering for the divine life, and regarding him with almost superstitious expectancy as the divinely appointed medium for its bestowal! The singing was good, and the tender, pleading prayer of the minister, with its dual consciousness of human weakness and of divine love and strength, seemed to lift Tom Lander's soul to the very gates of heaven. The discouragements of the morning were forgotten, and the mystic influence of the week-evening service returned in a more intense form.

Tom had hardly raised his head at the close of the prayer when a harsh voice, in a tone of suppressed annoyance, broke the charm, and Tom looked up with a start.

'Look here, my man, you and your people are in my pew. I pay rent for it, and don't much like to find it occupied. I'll be glad if you can find a seat somewhere else.'

It was Mr. Dorkins, the local bank manager, who, with his wife and eldest son, had arrived after the first prayer.

Poor Tom and his wife were profoundly ignorant of the mystery of church pew rents; and imagined that every soul seeking to find the way home to the Father was always welcome anywhere in the

Father's house. But the angry glance of Mr. Dorkins was unmistakable, and his rebuke, though uttered in a low tone, was audible almost all over the church.

The group of intruders scrambled hastily out of the seat, Susie shaking her six-year-old brother into semi-consciousness, for that young hopeful had gone sound asleep in the innermost corner of the pew. Their natural awkwardness was increased by the surprise and confusion of the incident, and they stood for a few moments huddled together in the aisle, looking helplessly for a seat. To make matters worse, Tommy, after a sleepy protest, and a not very gentle rejoinder from Susie, set up a snivelling wail. At this instant a very low but very sweet voice greeted them.

'Would you mind taking a seat in my pew? I am quite alone, and there is plenty of room.' And then to Tommy: 'Here, little man, will you come and sing out of my book? I know you can sing,' and as Tommy looked up into the face smiling down on him he thought it must be one of the angels his father had read about in the big brown Book.

Miss Vale was the only daughter of the wealthiest squatter in the district. While agricultural settlement had spread over a large part of what was once the vast Boobowie sheep-run, and a township had taken the place of the lonely shepherd's hut, the master of Boobowie still held a territory in

which two or three English counties might easily be lost. Miss Vale was not often seen in the little church, and old Cephas Vale never; but their seat-rent was regularly paid, and a substantial cheque found its way once a quarter to the Mission circuit stewards.

Opinions concerning the heiress of Boobowie varied greatly. Some affirmed that she was a veritable angel of light, and mysterious hints of her ministering to the needs of those in distress lent some colour to that appraisement. Others declared she was just a lawless child of the wilderness, crammed, it is true, with book-learning, but haughty, vain, and irreligious. If she was at all inclined to be a respectable member of society, why did she not get that old pagan father of hers to come to church? or, at any rate, why didn't she come more frequently herself, instead of galloping off on Sundays, nobody knew where, on that thoroughbred?

But no thoughts of this kind were in Tom Lander's mind. There was only deep gratitude to one who had shown tactful kindness to him and his in their painful perplexity, and a subtle feeling of comradeship, which is the instinctive response of a truly noble but untutored soul to a motive akin to its own best impulses.

But the service was a sad one for poor Tom. The stream of spiritual influence had been broken

and diverted from his soul by the shock and humiliation he had suffered. The sermon seemed poor and flat, and destitute of any appeal to his mind and heart.

No doubt the worn-out and dispirited minister was far from being at his best; but if the earnest-hearted bushman could have remained in the spiritually receptive condition in which he entered the little church, every word of the gospel, however feebly expressed, would have thrilled his spirit to its depths. But the thoughtless selfishness of the banker's words had chilled the man's soul.

There was another member of John Warren's congregation that evening who was having a very uncomfortable time, but from a totally different reason.

Arthur Dorkins, the banker's eldest son, again and again turned an anxious and apologetic glance at the Vale pew. But Clara Vale's eyes were steadily averted, and the angry flush that still mantled her cheek, and the just perceptible curl of contempt on her lips, offered but cold comfort to that young man's troubled feelings.

'Confound it,' he muttered, 'a nice mess the governor has made of it all. She'll regard us as the vilest snobs going. Why couldn't he let that fantastic crew stay in the seat till doomsday if they wanted it? I'd feel like punching the head of that back-blocks scarecrow if he were a few sizes smaller.'

It is to be feared that Mr. Dorkins, jun., did not receive much spiritual good from the Sunday evening service.

Every one in Boobowie knew the interest young Dorkins took in Miss Clara Vale, and the expectations, in which the banker participated, but which had this evening suffered a decided reverse.

At the conclusion of the service, as they emerged from the church, the young lady wished Mrs. Lander good evening in her pleasantest tones, and added:

'I shall expect you to occupy my pew till the chapel steward finds you a comfortable seat. Now, don't forget, or I shall be grieved,' and, with a parting word to Tommy, which completed the conquest of the mother's heart, she mounted her splendid thoroughbred, and was gone, to the manifest chagrin of Arthur Dorkins, who had hovered near the group endeavouring to catch Miss Vale's eye, and secure an opportunity to speak. But that wilful young lady was evidently in no mood to favour attempts at conciliation, and her would-be suitor was left to mutter anathemas on his luck and his father's folly on the way home.

Tom returned to their little cottage greatly troubled.

'Oh, Sally, what if the Great Father ain't got no use for poor bush chaps like me, and if, somehow, Jesus, God's good Son, what died, left us out of

tally when He fixed up for the prodigals, as the preacher called 'em, to get home again. Sometimes I feel like as if the Lord had picked out all He wants and put them on the home trail, and left us among those that ain't no value to Him or nobody.'

It was Sally's turn, with her quicker woman's sympathy and spiritual instinct, to come to the rescue.

'Why, Tom, it ain't no use to get down like that. Think of the way the Lord led them Israelites, and put up with all their silly capers. Besides, everybody won't be hard on us, like them giggling girls what didn't know no better, and that toffy old chap about his church pew. Think of Dave Morgan, and the minister, and the sweet young lady, and the kind way she treated us. Look, Tom, why don't you git a talk with the minister?'

Tom stared. This idea had never occurred to him before.

For perhaps an hour the pair determinedly plodded on with their Bible reading; hoping and expecting that its unfolding of the inner meaning of life, and its glorious revelation of the Father's will would fill their souls as formerly.

But no gleam of divine light broke through. They had read on into the latter part of Exodus, with its minute directions as to the ritual worship of the Israelites, and its purpose seemed utterly unintelligible to them.

At last they reluctantly gave up the fruitless task, Sally wisely suggesting that Tom would need a good night's rest to prepare him for his new employment under Mr. Sharp next day.

MORE DISAPPOINTMENTS

TOM Lander's first day's experience as delivery drayman for Reuben Sharp's general store was extremely trying. From his childhood he had been accustomed to score unrivalled success in the various employments of bushcraft. His great strength, manual dexterity, and long experience had made him an ideal bushman; but the strange conditions of his new employment, and perhaps a nervous anxiety to do well, made him specially apt to blunder.

It is curious that under such circumstances the work which at ordinary times can be performed with the utmost confidence and success now provides the most fertile field for irritating and apparently inexcusable mistakes.

A rather sharp rebuke from his employer early in the day, on account of a slight accident with some crockery, made him anxious and self-distrustful; and when later, by mistaking a direction, he delivered a baby's cot at the residence of two maiden ladies, his sense of discomfort and failure was complete.

A little after six o'clock Tom was affectionately grooming his horse, talking the meanwhile to the animal in the crooning monotone that a well-cared-for horse seems to understand so well. Tom had all an Australian's love for a good horse, and that instinctive sympathy with, and understanding of, animal nature which made him an ideal master of man's best four-footed friend. This was a beautiful roadster, full of fire and intelligence, and there seemed from the first moment to be a perfect understanding between Tom and 'Briton.'

The grooming was nearly finished, and Briton's bay coat shining like velvet, when Reuben Sharp entered the stable. Tom finished with his horse, then turned to his employer, and speaking in a voice that was sad, but firm and respectful, said:

'Look, boss, I'm afraid I ain't goin' to be no use to you at this 'ere job. Seems to me 's if I've lost any little gumption ever I had, and can't catch the lead for this deal nohow. I did kinder think it 'ud be better for Sally and the little 'uns to be inside civilization, so to speak, but if I can't get on and do a fair thing, I'll jist have to go back musterin' and colt-breakin' and sichlike at old Moses Levi's.'

As Reuben Sharp looked in the honest brown eyes of his drayman, and at the horse he loved rubbing his velvet nose against the man's shoulder, he felt a keen twinge of regret. He saw that his hasty words of the morning had much to do with

discouraging a man who was trying hard to succeed. Mr. Sharp had the reputation of being a hard man —rigidly honest, but close-fisted, and exacting in his dealings.

'No need for you to talk any stuff like that, Tom; you'll get into the way of things presently. I think your difficulties to-day were pretty much my fault. I forgot you were quite strange to the town. That will all come right after a bit. Don't let us say any more about it. Why'—and he laughed a little reassuring laugh—'what would Briton there do, if you cleared out and left me? He's fallen so much in love with you already that I'm half a mind to be jealous. Do you know I've sacked three chaps because they wouldn't look after Briton properly, and he didn't like 'em?

'By the way, Tom,' he added, 'if you don't mind, I'd like you to leave a parcel at old Barlow's, on your way home. He's laid up with a broken leg. You only need say that Mr. Sharp was instructed to send the things along.'

Tom shouldered the heavy parcel of groceries and trudged homeward with a lighter heart than he had had for the day.

He did not much enjoy his visit to the Barlow cottage. After an expression of wonder as to who his unknown benefactor could be, the old man occupied himself with disparaging comments on Reuben Sharp, and admonitions as to what the new

drayman might expect from his meanness and severity. These criticisms were emphasized at intervals by the remark, 'And him settin' up to be a Christian, and a-goin' about preachin' to people!'

After tea Sally put the big Bible before Tom, as if it was a matter of course, and drew her seat up beside him. Tom read on for a while. But whether it was physical weariness, or nervous exhaustion, or the disparaging references of old Barlow to Christians generally, and Reuben Sharp in particular, or perhaps a combination of all these causes, the Bible seemed to have lost that charm which had inspired his eager enthusiasm the previous week. Besides, they were still toiling through the closing chapters of Exodus, and were bewildered by the detailed account of the construction of the Tabernacle and the Ark. The gorgeous trappings of Jewish ceremonies were utterly meaningless to this child of the bush; and, after several attempts, Tom looked up sadly.

'It ain't no use, Sally. I'm clean bushed. We've got off the track somehow, and nobody ain't blazed the trees through this 'ere scrub plain enough for the likes of us to keep our bearings. Fact is, Sally, I don't feel nothing like so near gettin' home to God the Father as I did last week. I feel 's if He don't want me—'s if nobody kinder wants me.' And there was an unaccustomed tremor in Tom's voice.

'I must own, Tom, I'm awful disappointed,' his wife answered. 'It ain't like what I thought it would be after that meeting you told me about on Thursday night. But I'm sure it can't be the fault of the Father,' and the little woman's voice was unusually firm and positive. 'That there young man in the parable had a long tramp to get home, and I reckon it wasn't all easy like——'

Just then there was a rap at the half-open cottage door, and John Warren, the home missionary, entered.

'You'll excuse my coming late in the evening, won't you? It's my only clear evening, and I thought I would find Mr. Lander home.'

A few minutes' general conversation led on naturally to the theme which was supreme in the mind of each, the open Bible on the table providing a ready point of departure for dealing with spiritual matters. But before entering on that supreme theme the minister expressed his sincere regret for the rudeness and inconvenience they had suffered the previous evening.

Mr. Warren's manner and utterance were so homely and sympathetic that Tom had soon unburdened all his heart. The hopes and aspirations, the difficulties and disappointments of the past few days were all detailed in his quaint bush vernacular, and it is certain that no story of a soul's struggle after God was ever more sympathetically listened

to. The young minister braced himself with a kind of professional zest to guide these seekers into the kingdom. Had he not passed with credit his four local preacher's examinations, and the first year's probationer's course, and had he not *Banks' Manual* and Dr. Flame's *Philosophy of Salvation* at his fingers' ends? Beginning with the doctrines of the fall and of natural depravity, and warming to his work as he proceeded, Mr. Warren had gone through imputed sin, actual transgression, anticipations of redemption, the scheme of redemption, and was skilfully comparing legal justification with evangelical justification, when Tom broke in—

'Oh, Mr. Warren, I don't want to be rude like, you know I don't. But it won't ever be no good me trying to understand all that hard stuff. Seems like trying to teach a Barcoo nigger the working of one of them engines at the railway station yonder. It seems awful learned, but a poor chap like me can't kinder see no clear track through it. Oh, sir, will the Good Father want me to spell out the meaning of all them big words before He'll let me get home to Him, and learn to love Him, and try to make up for all the time that I've lived and never thought of Him at all?' There was intense anxiety in Tom's voice and gaze as he looked in the preacher's face.

The words of the bushman came to the young preacher like an overwhelming, all-revealing flash

of light. Never before had he seen into the naked depths of a human soul, in its supreme hunger for God with such vividness; and never had the outstretched arms seemed so real and His love so wonderful.

'I hope the Father will forgive me, and I hope you will, Mr. Lander, for my folly and blindness. I've altogether failed to give you the idea of the Heavenly Father that I wanted to. Let us get back to His own word. This is how God feels about His lost ones.'

And he read the fifteenth chapter of Luke, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son: then in the seventeenth chapter, the healing of the ten lepers, with its splendid conclusion, 'Lo, the kingdom of God is within you.' Then, dreading to again obscure the divine meaning with any word of his own in explanation, Mr. Warren bade them a warm-hearted good-bye, and departed.

As the preacher trudged home to his lodgings it was with very subdued but still very joyous feelings, and the certainty in his heart that the Divine Spirit would complete the work of grace begun.

Within the little room that served him for parlour, study, and bedroom in one, he argued the matter out with himself half aloud, after his habit when strongly moved.

'No, John Warren, you've been going largely on the wrong tack. You've been flinging indigestible

junks of theology at these people—I wonder how many more there are in my congregations like this man Lander and his wife—people that are hungering for the bread of life. And you've been rather proud of your skill at detaching these junks, and aiming them at their heads. Then again, no wonder the poor fellow didn't find anything to help him on Sunday night. Half the time I was thinking of the ugliness and unreasonableness of those beggars at Coondarrup, and the other half fidgetting because the quizzical eyes of that girl Clara Vale were on me, and I was wondering in my subconsciousness what I could say in face of her scientific agnosticism and French infidelity. Well, Warren, old man, you've got to realize yourself and to get others to realize that a man must receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child. Anyhow, I'll pray and hope and work this week that next Sunday we may see Tom Lander soundly converted.'

And with this hope comforting his soul John Warren went to sleep.

'A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM'

The Scripture reading had banished Tom's feeling of despair; but it was in a very anxious and troubled way he continued to discuss the question with his wife. Their three children had been silent but deeply interested listeners to the evening's conversation. Little Tommy had been fidgetting uneasily, and puckering up his brows in an ominous fashion. At last he broke out—

'Say, mum; I don't like God a bit.'

'Gracious, child, what are you saying?' cried the horrified Sally.

'Well, mum, see here, He ain't kind and nice and loving like daddy is, or He'd let you and daddy come right up to Him and love Him, and not keep you miserable-like for ever so long. I *know* He ain't as good as daddy, cos when I was a bad boy and broke Harry's mug because he hit my joey, and daddy put me outside, soon 'sever I cried and said I was sorry and wanted to love him he didn't keep me out a minute, but took me right in and loved me same as ever; and here's daddy and you bin ever so long, askin' and askin' Him—that's God—to let you

come right up to Him and love Him—and there, He don't take no notice, one bit.'

'But, Tommy, the Good Father will take daddy and me and all of us into His love one day. You know, Tommy, He's got an awful lot to do—all the world to look after. Maybe He hasn't had time to notice us poor folks yet.' And Sally's voice dropped into a sadder cadence in spite of all she could do.

Tommy shook his head, not at all convinced by this presentation of the case.

'Look here, mum, when the big man from the station come down and had 'portant business with daddy and was going to pay him money—lots—I got a spinter in my fum. I cried and went in to tell daddy, and he said right there, "'Scuse me, my little chap's hurt his hand," and he jist left the big man there and all the money, and took the spinter outer my fum, and kissed it and made it well. If daddy's the Great Father's little boy, why has daddy to be miser'ble so long?'

'Why, Sally, the little chap is right; he's right, sure as can be.' Tom's voice was full of exultant joy. 'I see it as clear as day. The Father doesn't want us to stand crying outside when we say we are sorry and want to love Him.'

And the praise that thrilled that night among the angels of heaven was praise 'perfected out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.'

. . . . . .

The day following the minister's visit to Tom's cottage the latter had occasion, in the course of his work, to deliver a grocery order at Dave Morgan's farm. Luckily it was at the hour of the mid-day meal, and this gave opportunity for an interesting talk with Tom's old friend of the back-blocks. Dave had been 'planned' at one of the outposts of the mission circuit on the Sunday, and so had not been present to welcome Tom to the services. He had learned, however, the incidents of the Sabbath—the appearance of the Lander family in their grotesque garb, the undisguised levity it produced, and the blunt removal of the newcomers from the bank manager's pew in the evening; and Dave Morgan was greatly concerned as to the effect of these experiences on the mind of his friend.

'Jolly glad to see you, Tom, old man. Here, Jimmy, take the horse round and give him a feed.

'You've seen my missus, have you? And the little 'un—a fair wonder, I tell you. Just in time for dinner, Tom. A drop of tea and a bit to eat was always the first thing in the back-blocks, wasn't it? Hope you're getting settled. How's things going with old Sharp? Not a bad old chap when you get to know him. Does a lot of good in a sneaky way, as if ashamed of himself for doing it; takes a sort of delight in letting people think he's the meanest old curmudgeon going. Tidy farm? Yes; not so bad. Manage to get on, spite of the rainfall being

a bit uncertain. Wouldn't do to have everything one craves in this world—wouldn't ever want to go to a better. Say, Tom '—they were seated in a comfortable farm kitchen—' heard you'd been at church a time or two since I saw you. Glad you came along. Guess you like Mr. Warren all right?'

Dave was feeling his way cautiously, and keenly watching his visitor's face. There was no mistaking the look, glowing with the deep, inner, newly-found joy, which Tom Lander turned on his friend. Dave started to his feet with a jubilant exclamation.

'Why, you've got it, Tom; I see it in your face. No man can look like that unless he has come face to face with the Lord.' And Dave grasped the hand of the drayman in a mighty grip. The responsive clasp of Tom's great fist would have made a weaker man howl with pain. Then the two men settled down to an earnest talk concerning that gracious presence of the Lord which had become so real in each of their lives.

'Yer see, Dave, after you got talking to me last Thursday I felt kinder broke up, clean busted, 'sif I'd never pick up my stride any more; then the service in the evening sorter brought the Lord in sight, and made me feel that somehow things was sure to come right. Then Sally and me, we got the Bible, and we kinder signed contract to run a trail right through from start to finish. Yer know, I

ain't much of a hand at readin', and it's tough work; but we're goin' to see it through fair and square.'

Then Tom detailed his experiences of the Sunday. He touched but lightly on the rudeness he had suffered, and blamed his own ignorance and awkwardness as the cause. Indeed the light and joy that filled his soul had almost obliterated all sense of the embarrassment and humiliation he had suffered. In the first flush of Christian certitude and joy, it seemed to this simple child of the desert that he was lifted above all mere accidental surroundings and conditions; and that henceforth it would be impossible for any of these things to disturb his mind or chill his heart.

Dave Morgan was delighted with the gentle modesty, yet true dignity, of his old friend. He would not for a moment condone the senseless conduct of the gigglers, nor the snobbishness of Mr. Dorkins; but, at the same time, he gave his friend a few kindly hints which would help him to guard against unwittingly giving cause for these displays. Having duly honoured Mr. Morgan's hospitality, Tom took his departure, after giving a promise to meet him at Peter Jones' class-meeting that evening.

Peter Jones, the leader of the one class in Boobowie Methodist Church, owned a small farm near the township. The infirmities of age had compelled him to hand over the active work of the

farm to his sons, and this gave him ample time for the duties of his sub-pastorate.

Concerning old Peter Jones there was but one opinion in Boobowie. He was a saint, judged by any standard of canonization with which this frontier town was acquainted.

Oddly enough too, this appraisement was not confined to those who would be regarded as religious people. To a large proportion of the population of Boobowie, for a man to attend church, and especially to take any active part in its services, was to be branded as a 'psalm-grinder' and to be regarded as an object of dislike and suspicion.

To this general rule Peter Jones was the one marked exception. Even drunken teamsters and derelict rouseabouts would say, 'I'll allow Peter's a religious bloke and all that, but he's a white man clean through,' and they would rival each other in emphasizing old Peter's virtues.

His influence among religiously disposed persons outside his own church was scarcely less than among his own fellow members; while to them he represented the final authority on all spiritual and moral questions.

For any ordinary case of spiritual difficulty the minister might do, if he were about, though he was more often absent in some remote part of his two hundred square miles of parish; but to deal with some flagrant breach of the moral law, or to counsel

some one who, having lived like a pagan, was now seriously 'preparing to die,' who would think of any one but old Peter Jones?

John Warren happened to be present at the class-meeting that evening, and his heart felt a great thrill of joy as Tom Lander, in company with Morgan, entered, and took his seat among the worshippers.

The meeting had not been long in progress when a storm, which had been gathering in the north-west, broke in a fury of rain and wind over the township.

Almost as the first crash of the storm drowned the voices of the singers, the door quietly opened and Miss Vale, of Boobowie Station, slipped into a seat at the back! She accepted a proffered hymn-book, but politely declined to come forward into the circle of the class. She had evidently taken refuge from the storm.

Mr. Warren looked troubled, and almost vexed. He had had an occasional conversation with the heiress of Boobowie; but she had worsted him in every encounter on religious topics with her keen wit, and, to him, unanswerable agnostic arguments. The last place in which he would wish to see Miss Vale, in her present frame of mind, was Peter Jones' class. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was looking on at the proceedings through the merry, half-mocking eyes of this interesting but

difficult young lady; and John Warren hardly joined with his usual heartiness in old Jones' prayer of thanksgiving for the rain that was fertilizing the earth.

Jones was an old-fashioned class-leader. He called on all the members in order of seniority for their 'experience,' commenting on each with much homely wisdom, but with an innocent disregard of grammatical rules. In addition to Tom Lander there were a few other visitors who were not on the class-books, and on these the leader did not call by name. He, however, used much indirect pressure to induce them to contribute a testimony.

He had the strongest opinion as to the value of 'taking up the cross,' as he generally expressed it; and had little hope of the spiritual growth of any who, did not, in addition to believing with the heart unto righteousness, make confession with the mouth unto salvation. Two or three had responded rather sheepishly to his exhortations. Then there was a pause.

'We've just five minutes,' said the leader. 'Now, if anybody haven't got nothing to be grateful to the Heavenly Father for, we cudn' ax 'e to spake; but ef 'e'——.

Tom's great form shot up to its full height against the chapel wall with the suddenness of a released spring. He turned half round, facing the little company, evidently deeply moved.

'Blest if you didn't get fair home that time, mister. Here I've kept yer kinder outside my guard this half-hour, 'cause I know I'm a poor ignorant chap, what's been in the bush all me life, and ain't fit to talk about these 'ere things, as I'm just tryin' to git the hang of. But' (and Tom's great frame shook with emotion), 'if yer go and put it that way, boss; if it means as him that sits dumb like a scared euro ain't got no gratitude to the great loving Father, and to Jesus, then I'm bound to follow yer lead.

'See here, mates,' he continued, 'all as I know about this 'ere game's about this: When I got to know that the Father God gave His Son for me, and wanted me back at the home what I'd swopped for the wickedness and meanness and misery of the forrin country, it broke me up.

'I don't know quite whether I got conviction of sin, like Mr. Warren here ses one orter git, and I can't jist make out about them two or three repentances one orter feel. I jist felt dead mean, and couldn't believe the Almighty would have any more to do with me. I can't go over the "process," as Mr. Warren called it, just now. But I know He's jist filled me up with love and joy, and it seems too good to be true—me, Tom Lander, what never cared for nothing but fightin' and cards and cussin; *me*, the child of the Great King.'

A great shout of thanksgiving shook the roof of the Methodist meeting-house, such as had not been heard there for many a day. Old Peter Jones broke out into singing:—

> I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
> Or to defend His cause;
> Maintain the honour of His name,
> The glory of His cross.

The members of the class caught up the refrain and sang it again and again, with an abandon which was above all mere rules of art:

> At the cross, at the cross,
> Where I first saw the light.

John Warren's heart was full of praise; but there shot across it a twinge of regret and anxiety. What would Clara Vale think of a religion that expressed itself in the coarse slang of the shearers' board and the bush card-table? He would try to get a word with Miss Vale, and straighten things a bit. But when he looked round, the back seat of the chapel was empty.

THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE

COMMON opinion in Boobowie was much divided as to Miss Clara Vale. If it was true that she had graduated at the University of Paris, and in addition had won the diploma of one of the foremost French musical academies, why did she bury herself in the station home of that old curmudgeon, Vale? If she spent much of her time and means in works of charity, why was it that the fact could only be guessed by the nods and mysterious hints of recipients who resisted all attempts of the gossips to elicit definite information concerning the doings of the heiress of Boobowie? Moreover, if she did the things that were supposed to be the outcome of Christian sympathy, why didn't she come to church, and behave like a sensible Christian girl ought to? There were very few visitors to Boobowie, and those who came were always driven there in the station wagonette, and had little or no intercourse with the township residents. Hence it is not surprising that many vague and contradictory reports concerning Miss Vale should be in circulation; or that the matronly opinion of Boobowie

should tend generally in the direction of disapproving the 'carryings-on' of that exasperating young woman.

'Well, you can say what you like'—it was Bill Griggs, the local greengrocer, who made the remark to Mr. Morgan as Miss Vale flew past on her thoroughbred—'I don't believe young women git any good agallivantin' about the country, Lord knows where, all times day and night, that way. I can't say but what she was 'mazin' kind to my missus 'fore she died; and I ain't no complaint to make as to what business I do with the head station; but why can't that there young woman settle down, and live like other decent folks?'

'See here, Bill; you needn't worry yourself about Miss Vale. Fact is, old man, you've trained yourself so long turning over good apples to find bad ones, that you've developed a kind of scent after rottenness to an abnormal degree, as one might say. You're a little too apt to believe everything wrong that goes a bit beyond you. My notion is that none of us 'll be the worse for an extra ration of the charity that thinketh no evil.' And David Morgan mounted his sturdy cob to jog home.

When Tom Lander, covered with the grime of a long, hot day's labour in Reuben Sharp's storeroom, returned to his cottage on Friday evening, he was dumbfounded to see Miss Vale's horse tied to the gatepost. He tried to dodge round to the rear

of the premises; but her eyes were upon him, and there was no escape. Miss Vale had taken possession of the curly-headed little Tommy, and was in animated conversation with Mrs. Lander. That little woman afterwards marvelled with a great wonder how she had been drawn out, in that half-hour's talk with this great lady, to tell all the simple story of their lives, and even that last sacred, wonderful chapter, the opening of the kingdom of heaven to these children of the Australian bush.

'Well, Mrs. Lander, I'm going to stay and have a cup of tea with you. I want to finish telling Tommy what a ship is like, and presently I want a chat with Mr. Lander.'

While the word-picture of the ship was being completed for the wondering Tommy, supplemented by a vivid description of a storm at sea, his father was making extraordinary efforts in the little wash-house at the rear to remove the last traces of his day's toil, and his wife was busily engaged, not without many a flutter of misgiving, in preparing for the evening meal. The provision and appointments of the little woman's table were plain to the point of bareness, but there was about it all a scrupulous cleanliness and a homelike aspect which did not fail to appeal to Clara Vale's good taste.

As Tom Lander joined the little company in the room which served for dining-room and parlour,

despite the rough moleskins and the bush jargon, there was an unconscious dignity in the huge, well-knit frame and brown, handsome face that Clara Vale was not slow to recognize. But she was sorely baffled in her attempts to draw Tom into conversation. Never before had her tact and skill in this direction been so utterly at fault. During the simple evening meal she tried every expedient that her alert mind could devise to get Tom to speak of himself, and particularly of his religious ideas and experiences, but without avail. In spite of his awkwardness and sheepishness, there was a gentle courtesy in Tom's brief replies that disarmed resentment, and marked the true gentleman under the rough bush garb; but that courteous reserve seemed impenetrable.

There was just a trace of impatience and abruptness in Miss Vale's tone as she rose to go.

'Well, Mr. Lander, I am pleased to have met you. I must confess I was much interested in your testimony in that meeting the other night. It seemed to me you had come into possession of some kind of religious faith different from the man-made, or, rather, priest-made, variety generally current. You said something about the Father having received you. Might I be rude enough to ask bluntly, How do you know that? Who told you it was so?'

She was standing where the glory of the setting sun streamed into the cottage door. She was a tall,

commanding woman; but her head did not reach much above the shoulders of the bushman standing before her. Tom hesitated a moment, and then looked straight down into the glorious hazel eyes fixed on his face. There was an earnest ring in the voice, and no trace of the carping critic in those honest eyes.

'Look, miss; I needn't tell you I'm jist an ignorant bushman, not fit to talk about these things with a lady like you. But '—and there was just a perceptible tremor in Tom's firm voice—'all I know is, the Father has jist spoke to me out of this 'ere book of His'n—spoke like never anything spoke before.'

'But I want to put this to you, Tom.' She had conquered this man's reserve at last, and she knew that now all his heart and mind would be opened to her gaze. She seated herself again at the little table, and pointed to the chair opposite.

'Some of the greatest men of the world, scholars and scientists—I need not bother you with their names—have given a lifetime of study to this book, the Bible. Instead of its being of divine origin, they show that it is just a collection of legends, folk-lore, and other religious fables, showing what were the ideas concerning God and religion among certain ancient races. They show that it is just one among a score of books of religion or "bibles"—better than most of them, no doubt, especially in

parts, but of much the same character and origin. Now, if this is so, how does this book come to do all this for you that you say?'

There was not a shadow of anxiety or uncertainty in Tom's tone as he replied:

''Taint no use, miss, me trying to talk about how this 'ere book come to be what it is. That's all learned work I'll never be able to look at, and sorry I am that that's so. But just let me put this my own way. Back years ago at old Levi's, two swells came out to make a geological survey, they called it. The old boss sent me to help 'em; that is, to hump round their hammers and a crowbar and some bottles, and a lot of rubbishing junks of rock they was always bustin' off some cliff or other and carryin' back to camp. Gittin' them rocks was the blessedest lot of nonsense ever I heard tell of. Well, them two fellers took to argifying how them rocks was made and where the earth atop of them come from. One of 'em said that a monstrous great field of ice, at some time or other slid over all the country thereabouts, and kinder ground up everything fine like flour; and then it picked up a lot of pebbles and things, and bimeby spread the stuff all out again yards and yards thick, with them pebbles and rocks like plums in a duff. And he pinted to cliffs of this here tack in one of the big gullies, and called it glacial till.

'Then the other feller swore there wasn't no glacier about it, and said that, ever so long ago, in some way that I couldn't make out, them two mountains had sort of rubbed up aginst each other, and ground up that stuff before the crust of the earth had got settled down quiet like. And there they kept arguing whether it was crush 'glomerate or glacial till. But both of 'em agreed that the good soil on top of this 'ere plum duff stuff had come down from the high mountains. All this time, blessed if my sheep didn't eat the good feed, and get fat, on that same country, and never troubled as to how it all got built up before they was born.'

There was an artist soul latent in Tom Lander, and he knew he need not explain his illustration to the girl before him.

Clara's eyes shone. 'Yes, Tom, yes, I see. The sheep got the best of that bargain, didn't they; and it wouldn't have been any use telling the sheep that the grass wasn't good to eat, and that they ought to wait till the geologists had settled the question of origins, would it?

'But see, there's another thing, though, I want to speak about. You won't mind my speaking plainly; I feel very earnest about this. It's about—about Jesus. Many people cannot believe all the marvellous things the Bible says about Him—about His birth and His miracles; about His being

God, in fact. It is freely admitted that He was a wonderful character, a marvellously great and good Man; but what made you speak about Him the other night as if you had had some kind of personal dealing with Him—as if He was alive, you know? You see, He died—was nailed up, as you called it—hundreds of years ago.'

Tom spoke very gently. It seemed the place he was treading on was holy ground.

'Sally and me was reading last night about a chap that was blind—born like it. He was that way till he was forty. One day Jesus happened along, and was awful sorry for the poor chap, and He mixed up a bit of mud, and put it on his eyes, and his sight came all right. Then them priests wanted to argy that Jesus couldn't be a good man, because He did this job on a Sunday. But he jist rounded 'em up every time with saying, "I don't take no deal in them arguments of yourn. I jist know this: up to yesterday I was blind as a wombat, now I can see."

'When I read that, miss, it reminded me of when I was a young chap at Woolgipena. I was a sort of boss fighter in the district, if you'll pardon me saying it. Well, a fair-faced young Englishman come there to be book-keeper for the old man. The boys got it whispered about that he'd come from some great college, and was a crack with his fists. But he'd never let on. He was civil and

kind to every one, and never put on no airs, never swore, and spoke gentle like, like a girl. Well, those chaps swore they'd git off a fight. I'd be ashamed to tell you how it was done. But I was fool enough to be talked into insulting Frank. He was only a thin slip of a boy alongside me. Then, when he wouldn't take no notice, they made me do it again and again. Till one day he turned round and looked at me with those great, lovely eyes of his'n—eyes like yours, miss—and he said all sad like,

'"I'm awful sorry, Tom, because I like you, and I don't really believe you mean this; but I'm afraid it means quarrelling. Won't you shake hands, mate, and be friends, and drop this foolery?"

'Then I called him something I daren't repeat, and, like a flash, there I was, all in a heap, in the corner of the cook-house, wondering what had come to me. They stuck me up to fight him; but lor, miss, I was a baby in his hands, I didn't 'smuch as see him after the fust two seconds. I couldn't open my eyes for a week, and every day he come, and tended me, and read to me, 'sif I was a sick child.

'Now some of them chaps always wanted to argy away that thrashing I got. They wanted to say that it was the fust lick that did it, and that if I'd cut for a fresh deal I'd be sure to win; but I knew

that Tom Lander, the fighter, had met his master in the English boy with fair curls and the great, kind eyes. There, miss, p'r'aps I can't make you see it the way I do; but Tom Lander, what didn't care for nothing but to gamble and drink and fight and cuss, has met one stronger than these devil's passions that was inside, and I know that it's Him, the Lord Jesus, the same that cured the man born blind.'

Tom had been carried away by his theme. He had forgotten that he was trying to reason out the most momentous of all questions—the life-and-death problem of salvation—with a beautiful and cultured woman. The thrill of a wonderfully clear and tangible inner experience had made his soul glow with something of prophetic fire. He now looked up in some confusion in his visitor's face. She was very pale; but her eyes glowed with an expression of high resolve.

As she stood beside her horse she held out her hand to say good-bye. Her fingers closed with a firm pressure over the bushman's great palm. It was too dark to see her face; but her voice had a tone Tom had never heard before as she said—

'Mr. Lander, will you speak to your Master and Friend, on behalf of a poor girl who wants to know Him as you know Him?'

DAYBREAK

AT the next leaders' meeting of the Boobowie Church Mr. Warren presented several names of persons to be received 'on trial' for church membership, among them Thomas Lander, Sarah Lander, and Clara Vale.

Only from stray words dropped on rare occasions could any idea be gained of that all-important transaction of the soul which brought Clara Vale into conscious union with the Lord. When she came downstairs the morning after the interview in Tom Lander's cottage old Cephas Vale saw a glow on the face of the daughter he almost worshipped which he had never seen before. It was something of that glory the startled Israelites saw on the face of their great leader when he descended Mount Sinai —the 'solar look' about which Joseph Cook loved to talk. But no one must pry into that scene where, in the glow of a new-found joy, Clara Vale told all her heart to that father whom she loved with a love only second to that which had been shed abroad in her soul by the Holy Spirit. That day a note reached John Warren, the home mis-

sionary, containing a modest confession of faith in Jesus, and an application to be received into the membership of the Boobowie Methodist Society.

My temporary residence in the frontier township fortunately extended through the revival that followed the events I have sketched. I say 'the revival,' because, to this day, old Jones (the class-leader), Dave Morgan, Reuben Sharp, and others will use that distinguishing term to mark the gracious experiences that for weeks and months followed the conversion of Tom Lander.

In a meeting of young women who were inquirers after salvation, which Miss Vale had convened for mutual prayer and counsel, as if under a special divine impulse, she was led to speak of the hour of her conversion.

In that midnight vigil, gazing through her open casement into the glory of the Australian sky, with all the philosophical doubts and difficulties of her agnostic creed crowding with unwonted vividness upon her mind, with that passionate loyalty to truth which had led her, dwelling in an atmosphere of French infidelity, to renounce Christianity as an outworn and disproved mythology, the soul of Clara Vale had called out for some sure basis of religious certitude. Was there any gateway of simple faith and obedience through which God—if there was any intelligent, personal God—would come into the citadel of the soul, as He had apparently come

to the untutored soul of Tom Lander? If He should come, was she willing to make that surrender, accept all the obligations and consequences of Christian faith? For her own clear reason taught her that, if such a being as God existed, absolute obedience to Him must be the soul's duty and delight. Was it possible for the self-centred intellectualism which had become her life-habit to be changed in a moment to a Christ-centred faith? Like the whisper of an angel came the words, 'With God all things are possible,' and, in the sheer helplessness of an utter surrender, the proud heiress of Boobowie threw herself upon the mercy of God. 'The witness of the Spirit' which came in that sweet hour remained an abiding testimony to the presence of the Lord.

I do not know whether it would be desirable or expedient to trace the after-experiences of several of those I have mentioned in this sketch of South Australian frontier life; or to mark the changes which have altered, beyond recognition, the Boobowie Home Mission, and made it a leading Methodist circuit; but I have said sufficient to show why, from an attitude of partial indifference, I have come to regard the work of Methodism in the 'regions beyond' as the brightest evidence of her divine mission.

THREE CHRISTMAS GIFTS

THE WAIF

'I DON'T think we'll put another flitch on the pit this afternoon, Jim. It's pretty hot, and I don't feel like working late on Christmas Eve. You just clean up the pit a bit while I go down the gully and fetch the big cant-hook. We'll put on that last big log ready for breaking down when we turn-to on Thursday.'

Frank Millard was a fine type of an Australian bushman. Six feet high, with immense shoulders and limbs, but without a surplus ounce of flesh on his frame. 'Strong as a bullock,' was the general characterization of him among the dwellers in the little gold-diggings settlement a few miles from the mining town of Creswick. As usual among men on the diggings, Frank Millard had a nickname He was commonly called 'Judge.' Indeed, it is doubtful whether a dozen men in the district knew his proper name. Perhaps the name had arisen from his extreme reticence, which had prevented his having much in common with the motley crowd which in those days was always to be found on a diggings; or perhaps it arose from a certain force

and incisiveness of utterance when he did happen to speak. He was about forty years of age. His hair and full beard were as black as a coal; his face tanned by exposure to the colour of sole leather, but relieved from the impression of hardness which the square jaw and firmly-set mouth would convey by a pair of large brown eyes, singularly soft in expression, and generally wearing a look of abstraction, as if their owner were occupied with thoughts that sped far from his immediate occupation.

Judge Millard was not a digger. He had worked in the mines and at many other occupations, but when our story opens, at the Christmas of 1860, was cutting timber for the Creswick mines in the edge of the forest, long since swept out of existence, which in those days clothed the ranges and broad flats in the neighbourhood of that township.

His mate, Jim, or James Barber, was a well-grown, raw-boned youth of eighteen; the ordinary type of a hard-working, soft-hearted bush lad. A year before he had come to the sawpit, carrying his swag, and looking for work. Judge put him to help roll in logs, and generally to make himself handy about the sawpit. Later on, pleased with his willingness and civility, he had shown him how to handle a pit saw, and 'sharp' and 'keep' the tools; and in a few months Jim was a good sawyer, Judge Millard's mate or partner, and almost a

worshipper of his brawny comrade. Jim had been brought up in the bush, and had never been to school in his life; but in the long winter evenings Judge had taught him to read and 'cipher.' An eager desire for self-improvement had taken possession of the ungainly youth, and he made astonishing progress.

As Judge went off for the cant-hook Jim shovelled out the sawdust from the pit, humming a bush melody the while, in high good humour that his mate had determined to knock off early this broiling Christmas Eve. For Judge was a tremendous 'grafter,' and usually worked from daylight to dark.

Millard had only left the pit a few minutes when Jim was startled by a woman's voice.

'Jim—oh, you're down there, are you? I couldn't see you anywhere. Where's Judge?'

A tall, handsome woman of about twenty-five, with a baby in her arms, was standing among the 'scantlings' near the edge of the sawpit.

'Oh, it's you, Mrs. Cronin,' Jim answered, scrambling up from the pit. 'Judge has gone down the gully to where we cut down the big red-gum yesterday. He'll be back in about half an hour.'

'Well, I can't wait, Jim. You see, I got a post-office order from Tom by the mail to-day, and I want to go over to Bill Sowden's for some things

for Christmas. Tom's with some drovers taking sheep away over the Alps to Omeo. I've got to get over Brady's Gap and get back before dark. It's so dreadful hot, and I've a lot to carry, I want you to let me leave baby under your saw-shed till I come back. You see I've carried her up the creek nearly two miles, and it's another two over the range to Sowden's. She'll sleep all the time, and if she should wake up I'll leave a bottle here you might give her, please.'

Jim was fairly staggered. He knew not what to do. He knew Judge hated women, and he could quite believe he had a horror of children. But how could this lonely woman, who lived two miles down the creek, and whose husband was a couple of hundred miles away, carry her baby and her goods over the rugged bridle-path across Brady's Gap? But what would Judge say? Jim had a wholesome fear of the wrath of this silent man.

'Come, Jim, you won't refuse to help me in a little matter like this. I must go over to get my order cashed; and I'm sure the baby won't worry you a bit.'

There was a soft, pleading tone in Kate Cronin's voice, which, with one look into her great black eyes, made a complete conquest of poor Jim. He fixed a tarpaulin to keep off the hot wind, and made a soft bed of stringy-bark fibre, or 'bull's-wool';

and, as Mrs. Cronin disappeared up the track for Brady's Gap, he gazed with some pleasure, mixed with a good deal of apprehension, on his handiwork.

He intended to get in the first word, and explain to Judge how impossible it was to do other than take care of the poor woman's baby for an hour or so, while she toiled over Brady's Gap and back; but as the minutes passed, his confidence that he could make a good case rapidly vanished. He was anxiously watching the path along which he expected his mate to return, when a shout behind him startled him almost out of his wits.

'Hello, Jim, there. What in the devil's name is this?'

Judge's wrath exceeded his worst fears. Jim had never seen the eyes of his mate burn so fiercely, and the torrent of angry invective from this usually silent man was appalling.

Jim made a feeble attempt to explain and justify the situation, but even to himself his stammering excuse seemed a rank failure.

After his outburst Judge relapsed into more than his usual taciturnity, only relieved by an occasional sentence like the snap of a pistol-shot, as he pushed on with his work. But the savage way in which he handled the tools, and the almost superhuman strength he threw into the task of rolling the huge red-gum log on to the pit, indicated that his rage still burned.

When the log was securely 'dogged' in position, ready when work should be resumed on the day after Boxing Day, Judge turned shortly to his mate.

'Well, you blamed fool, what are you goin' to do with that kid?'

Jim had been watching with growing anxiety the track from Brady's Gap. The sun was getting low, and Mrs. Cronin should have been back before now.

'If yer don't mind, Judge,' Jim answered very humbly, 'I'll stay here and set them saws, and do an odd job or two. She can't be very long. You might go to the hut and boil the billy, if you don't mind.'

'Well, that's about the best you can do. But p'r'aps if I leave you here the next thing'll be you'll engage yon woman as housekeeper or parlour-maid, p'r'aps, or summat.'

With this parting shot Judge swung off in the direction of their hut, leaving Jim in no enviable frame of mind.

Judge had met their neighbours, Tom Cronin and his wife, only a few times. Cronin was the ordinary type of Australian stock-drover, about twenty years older than his wife, and not of a high order, either mentally or morally. Mrs. Cronin had markedly tried to make herself agreeable to the grim, silent sawyer, but his passive aversion to women in general seemed in her case to have developed into an active dislike.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and the short summer twilight was rapidly deepening into night, and Jim had not come in from the pit. Evidently the baby's mother had not kept her tryst.

'That young fool's afraid to come,' muttered Judge. 'There, I don't know if I'd a-been any better at his age. 'Spose I'd have sold my soul to a pair of dark eyes and a soft voice. The poor chap can't go any longer without his supper, anyway.'

Judge went to the door, and, putting four fingers into his mouth, sent forth the ear-piercing whistle peculiar to Australian bushmen. He made the tea in the black billy, and set out their homely meal—salt mutton, good home-made bread (for both Judge and Jim were good cooks, and never resorted to damper), and the peculiar cake made of ordinary dough, with the addition of black 'ration' sugar known as 'brownie.' By this time Jim, looking very crestfallen and frightened, and bearing the baby in his arms, appeared at the door.

'Don't be cross with me, Judge, old man. I know I'm a blessed fool; but I won't let the young-un worry you mor'n I can help. I can look after it. Yer see, I was the oldest of six kids, and had to do for most of 'em. Somethin' must a-gone wrong to keep the woman. Will yer let me fix up the baby till morning, and if she don't turn up I'll go over to Sowden's and see what's the matter.

Judge grunted an assent. Jim fixed up a bed in a gin-case, with plenty of 'bull's-wool' and a blanket, and the six months' old baby girl slept as peacefully as if in a palace.

'Say, Judge, old Barney Slogan has some goats. Reckon the old man would let me have some milk. Shall I go over to Barney's? Then I could fix up a feed for the baby with some rusks, and the young 'un 'll be all right till her mother turns up.'

Judge only nodded, and Jim strode off for Slogan's, a mile over the range.

For some time after his mate's departure Judge sat looking gloomily into the dying embers of the fire. His face wore a hard and bitter expression, as if his remembrances were of a very unpleasant kind. Then he behaved in a very peculiar fashion. He lit the slush-lamp—an instrument consisting of a jam-tin filled with fat, with a roll of rag forming a wick in the centre, and placed it on a shelf where the light fell on the sleeping baby. For a long time he gazed on the sweet little face. Every trace of anger and bitterness had vanished from the man's face; and the great brown eyes glowed with a wonderful tenderness, like the autumn twilight of an Australian sky. Then he knelt beside the gin-case, and lifted one of the tiny hands with his huge fore-finger. The little rosy fingers shut instinctively around his big brown one, with the strength of grip peculiar to a little infant; and,

while the baby smiled in her sleep, the burly bushman remained for many minutes motionless, lest he should break the spell of what seemed to him like an angel vision.

What secret chamber of memory, locked and barred for long years, had those little fingers reopened? Then Judge gently lifted the baby hand and pressed it softly to his bearded lips; and —who would have credited it?—this grim, silent man, of whom the reckless community about him stood in respectful awe, dropped a great round tear on the blue blanket where the little child's face rested so peacefully.

'Oh, Constance, Constance, how things might have been otherwise!' he muttered.

As Frank Millard sat in his usual place beside the hut fireplace, was it once more true that—

A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things?

Jim soon returned with the goats' milk from Slogan's. As he prepared the food and attended to all the needs of his little charge with the deftness and tenderness of a woman, one would hardly recognize the shy, over-grown, ungainly youth who toiled daily on Judge's sawpit.

Very early next morning Jim set off for the mining camp, where Bill Sowden's general store and shanty combined were situated, to find out what had detained Mrs. Cronin. He was in much better spirits than on the previous day, for Judge had not

said a harsh word to him that morning about accepting the care of Mrs. Cronin's infant, but, on the contrary, had spoken so gently when any reference was made to the child that the tender-hearted Jim felt more inclined than ever to worship his mate and benefactor.

Judge tidied up the hut, and made preparation for their morning meal; for Jim had only had a pannikin of cold tea and a snack of food before leaving. It would be an hour and a half at the very least before Jim could reach Sowden's and return. A movement and a half cry brought Judge to the gin-case crib. He lifted out the baby, and sat by the fire petting the wee hands, and pinching the rosy cheeks, till she cooed with delight, and responded by burying both hands in the masses of the bushman's black beard, and holding on with might and main.

Just then a hurried step on the gravel path announced Jim's return—at least half an hour before his time!

He hurried into the hut wearing on his face such an expression of anxiety and woe that Judge started to his feet.

'Good heavens, Jim; what's up now? How are you back so soon? What about the woman?'

'Judge, old man, I'm clean busted. I don't know what we're to do. I met Billy, the mailboy, just on the Gap, and he told me if that there

darned woman ain't gone and got on the spree. She went to Widow Morgan's, at the eating-house, you know; then later they sent in to Sowden's for a bottle of gin, and then more; and Billy says when he left this morning them and a couple more women jist looked like making a lively Christmas of it. I came back to see what you thought we'd better do. Seems to me I'd better just take the young 'un over and let that there woman do the best she can with it. Though I don't think much of its chances with them lot. Anyhow, Judge, I 'spect I'd better take it over.'

Perhaps Jim had a keener insight into human nature than people would credit him with; and it is likely he shrewdly guessed what kind of a reception his mate would give to his proposal—particularly when he found the baby girl in Judge's arms, and her dimpled fingers clutching his beard.

'What! Ain't you got any more human feeling than a darned great bullock, that you'd hand over the poor kid to that drunken she-devil? No, Jim, we'll keep the youngster here till that fool of a woman comes to her senses.' Then he muttered: 'She'd better keep out of my way when she does.'

Jim's face was beaming as he bent over the fire to warm the milk for the baby's breakfast; while Judge seemed quite content with his new rôle of nurse.

During the long Christmas Day both men seemed almost completely engrossed with their baby charge. They had previously arranged to journey with a party of pleasure-seekers to Creswick to witness a series of foot-races being held there, but it never seemed to occur to them to even mention their disappointment at the unexpected frustration of their plans. Judge did not often refer to the child, and when he did it was in a gruff, off-hand fashion clumsily designed to convey the impression that he took not the slightest concern in the poor little waif which had been cast upon their mercy. And yet, quite an unnecessary number of times during that day and the next he made some remark to Jim in a tone he would use to discuss the feeding of a pet joey.

'I say, Jim, ain't it nearly time you got some grub ready for that there kid?' Or, 'Seems to me the nipper ain't taking much to eat. We don't want no inquiry about an infant dying of starvation.'

'Oh, it's all right, Judge, old man. I'll look out the youngster has tucker enough. I helped bring up four of 'em on the bottle.'

And Jim smiled quietly when Judge wasn't looking, for he knew very well the child would die of the opposite of starvation if the anxiety of Judge should determine its diet.

More than once Jim saw his mate looking with furtive longing eyes at the little form in the gin-

case crib; and there was little doubt that he was able to assess at its true value the older man's attempts at expressing surly indifference. Jim would lift the baby out of her crib, and a few minutes after remark in a casual fashion:

'Oh, blest if I haven't forgotten to bring up some water from the creek. Would you mind taking the young 'un for a minute while I fetch a bucket.'

Judge would take the child without a word, but with a little more promptness than might be regarded as consistent with his air of indifference; and it was further to be noticed that on such occasions he seemed in no haste to get rid of his unaccustomed charge.

As the Christmas evening was drawing in, Bob Smithins, a splitter, whose hut was a mile or so down the creek, returning earlier than was the general custom on such occasions from Sowden's shanty, stopped at the sawyers' hut.

'Hulloa, Bob, is that you? Come in and have a drop of tea. You've been keeping up Christmas over the range, I expect. Well, anything special going?'

'No, Judge; things is pretty tame over there. All the fellers nearly left for Clunes before I got over. Douglas's bullockies is there on the spree; but I ain't having any of that brand. I ain't up to much, but I turn down when Bill Douglas's lot's got the deal.'

'On the bust, are they? That's nice, Jim; and they were coming to-morrow to haul them logs for us out of Wombat Gully. We've only that one big red-gum log at the pit.'

'If that's so,' Bob remarked, as he poured his tea from the pannikin into the billy-lid to cool, 'you can go in for a longer holiday than you bargained for, for you'll not see anything of them bullockies this week.'

'Anyhow, Jim, it won't be much use for us to start to-morrow with just that one log, so I think we may as well call Boxing Day a holiday, and then see what turns up.'

Jim noticed that his mate, who never touched whisky, and usually said a few biting things about men who got on the spree, seemed to take the conduct of the truant bullock-drivers in a very mild spirit.

During the following day—Wednesday—things went on in much the same way in the sawyers' hut. Judge spent a lot of time nursing the baby, and did not take up the task with such a shame-faced and apologetic manner as before. Jim went about his tasks happy enough in the occupation of the moment, but with a gathering anxiety disturbing his mind. He had heard nothing of Mrs. Cronin, and he had learned from Bob Smithins the previous evening that the splitter had seen nothing of her at the Brady's Gap camp. He found it necessary

towards the evening to make a journey over to the camp for various household supplies, Judge cheerfully undertaking to look after the baby.

As he returned an hour and a half later, Judge could tell by his walk as he came along the gravelly bush track skirting the hill that something unusual had occurred. Instead of that slouching ungainly walk which always suggested the movements of a half-grown Newfoundland pup, Jim walked with a hurried, anxious step; and as he approached it was a very troubled face that met Judge's inquiring gaze.

'Well, Judge, if I ain't clean knocked out this trip. Fair busted!' And Jim dropped his bundle on the floor, and dropped himself on the slab stool with the air of a man who feels that the bottom has fallen out of everything.

'Hang it all, man, don't sit there staring like a mole in the lamp-light. What's the matter? Out with it. What's wrong about the young 'un?'

'Well, she's gone—sloped, you understand—clean skedaddled with some cove from over St. Arnaud's way. What shall we do, Judge, old man? And it all comes of my foolery in listening to that hussy's soft talk. Jist you pitch in as hot as you like, Judge. I deserve it all right. Seem's to me I'd feel kinder better if some one would just kick me a spell.'

But Judge seemed in no mood to gratify his mate's cravings. A few pointed questions elicited

all Jim had been able to glean concerning Mrs. Cronin's flight.

On the afternoon of Christmas Day she had been noticed in close conversation with a young man who was recognized as Harold Bateman, the son of a wealthy squatter near St. Arnaud's, who had come over to the camp with a party to inspect a promising reef in the neighbourhood. About twelve o'clock next day, a light trap, with a fine pair of horses, and driven by young Bateman, pulled up a few doors from Sowden's, and a few minutes later Mrs. Cronin got into the trap and they drove off at a smart pace in the direction of Creswick. It was known at Brady's Gap Camp that prior to her marriage Kate Cronin had been employed as a barmaid in the principal hotel in St. Arnaud's, so her acquaintance with the son of 'Nipper' Bateman, as the squatter was generally called, and her departure in his company, were easily explained, and created no surprise in the little mining community.

Having learned all his mate had to tell, Judge Millard dropped into more than his usual taciturnity. He volunteered no word of comment about the woman who had deserted her home and child, nor concerning the child herself, and Jim feared to break the icy reserve with which the bushman had surrounded himself.

Next day a letter was brought to the sawyers' camp by the butcher. It bore the Ballarat post-mark, and was in Kate Cronin's handwriting. The letter merely stated that her child would probably be better in the care of the Government than with such a mother; that it would be waste of time to make any inquiries as to her whereabouts; and that if they thought fit they could find all the baby's clothes, &c., with her birth certificate, and her mother's marriage 'lines,' in a box in Tom Cronin's hut. The key was on the door-ledge.

Judge read the letter without a word, and handed it to his mate. The latter made a few remarks in a tentative fashion, and watched his friend's face with a look of expectant inquiry. But by neither word nor look did Millard give the slightest indication of his temper or intentions.

Later in the day Mounted Trooper Brooks, from Creswick, reined up at the hut, and after a friendly word of greeting dismounted and joined the sawyers in the inevitable pannikin of tea.

'I was at Brady's Camp, Millard, so I thought I'd just jog over and have a friendly chat with you about this youngster that you've got left on your hands. Of course, you'll hand it over to Government as a deserted child, so I thought I'd best just let you know how to go about it. Fact is, if you want to get rid of it right away it's my duty to take

the young 'un over with me. You can sign the necessary papers when you come over.'

'That means, I suppose, Brooks, that the youngster will be taken over as a pauper by the State and farmed out or something to people who get a trifle for looking after these spare scraps of humanity?'

'Well, yes, mate; that's about it.'

'Thank you, trooper, very much, for your kindness and the trouble you've taken—here, have a drop more tea, and this brownie of Jim's ain't half bad—but we're going to keep the kid here. I've got a feeling somehow as she'll be as well off as going to the workhouse, anyhow.'

Jim uttered a mighty shout. 'Darn my blessed eyes, if that ain't the best word I ever heard in all my days!'

He danced around the table and grabbed Judge's great hand in both his own hard fists while the tears ran down his face.

'Oh, Judge, if you ain't the best bloke, the soundest, solidest bit of stuff right through—not a shake or a gum-vein or a bit of dry rot in you.'

Then Jim broke down and put his head on the rough bush table and cried like a child. You see, he was but a boy, after all, although he could do the longest and hardest day's work on Judge Millard's sawpit.

'But, Judge, do you really mean that you are going to keep that baby here—and a girl baby, too—and take all the responsibility of it in your own hands? Have you thought all round this thing, old man?'

'That's all right, Brooks. So now, if you don't mind, we won't say any more about it, except this, that I'll be grateful if you'll get things fixed up with the authorities, so that I may have a right to keep the youngster even if that good-for-nothing woman should ever turn up again.'

The trooper readily promised to take the necessary steps to have Frank Millard legally appointed State guardian of the little waif.

When the story went around, most of those who heard it required a varied stock of adjectives to state how many kinds of a fool they deemed Judge to be. While others, with many a knowing wink, expressed opinions concerning the relations of Judge to his little charge which it was just as well for them that the brawny sawyer did not hear.

And thus it was that a strange Christmas gift came into the bush home of Frank Millard and Jim Barber on that Christmas Eve of 1860.

THE FIRE FIEND

TWENTY years had passed since the Christmas Eve when Kate Cronin left her tiny baby girl at 'Judge' Millard's sawpit. On the evening of Friday, 24th December, 1880, we resume the story of the little group of persons whose acquaintance we made in the old rough days of the Creswick diggings.

Frank Millard and his mate Joe Barber have seen many ups and downs in those twenty years. There have been times when a run of 'hard luck' has brought them to their last shilling and their last meal; but on the whole things have prospered with them. The old sawpit has long since disappeared, and the hut near Brady's Gap was deserted years ago. After the fashion of Australian bush workers the two friends had turned their hands to many occupations—fencing, road-making, mining, wool-carting, and half-a-dozen other kinds of work; but now, at the Christmas of 1880, for six years they had conducted a prosperous timber mill on the fringe of what remained of the once vast Bullarook Forest. Neither man had married—nor apparently had ever thought of such a thing.

Together they occupied a substantial weatherboard cottage, a hundred yards from the sawmill, and fronting the road, which seemed the natural line of demarcation between the 'timber country' on the west and the undulating wheat paddocks which stretched in golden glory towards the sun-rising.

Our old friend Judge had not greatly changed in the twenty years, except that his jet-black hair and beard were almost white. His great frame bore erect the weight of sixty years, and his physical strength seemed to have suffered little decline. Jim had developed into a splendid fellow. He was Judge's right-hand in the mills, and dreamed of no higher purpose in life than rendering whole-hearted service to the man whom he loved with all the strength of his deep nature.

And what of the little waif—the Christmas gift to the lonely bushmen twenty years before?

'She's to have my name, Jim,' Judge had remarked a few days after the flight of Kate Cronin. 'There ain't any need for her to know anything about that hussy of a mother of hers—leastways for many a year. We'll call her 'Carissima.' I needn't tell you why I want that name. It's my fancy. When she's big enough we can send her away to school; but there's plenty of time to think of that.'

The years slipped by, and little Caris was the light of the sawyers' house. But the time came

when the child must go to school. What the wrench meant, and how long it was deferred upon one pretext and another, it would be hard to say. But one day two burly bushmen rang the doorbell at Madame Pickard's—the foremost ladies' seminary in Melbourne in those days. With them was a little girl of nine years, whose nut-brown face was in curious contrast to her blue eyes and waving, golden hair.

It was an odd group in madame's reception-room. Jim had never been in a parlour in his life. He sat on the outer edge of a chair, with his long arms hanging straight down, like the partly-severed limbs of a tree. His great feet were tucked under the chair, and his knees sloping upward were pressed close together.

His surroundings were a great surprise to him, but the manner of his mate was a surprise far greater. Judge rose from his seat and greeted Madame Pickard with the quiet ease of a man who had been in ladies' drawing-rooms all his life. There was not a trace of bush slang, and his speech was that of a polished gentleman.

'You will pardon the rather unusual manner of our visit, madame. My little girl has lived her life in a distant bush home, with no educational opportunities but the very poor help I could give. What she has done is very elementary, but you will find it correct, as far as it goes. Her English

and arithmetic are not bad for a little child, and she shows some facility in French and Latin for one so young. I wish you to give her the best training your school affords. She will make her home entirely with you, and I hope to come and see her at least once a year.'

Soon all details were arranged, and the two men on the way to their distant home, from which it seemed to them all the light and joy had gone out.

Jim was much puzzled. Who was this silent man who seemed able to change in a moment into another being and discuss the details of a young lady's education with the chief of a college? Now he knew what those two hours a day had meant, which Judge had religiously set apart for himself and Caris to spend together.

Nine years were spent by Caris under Madame Pickard's roof—years in which more than once the gaunt spectre of want had looked in at the bushmen's door; but never once had the remittance to the college been a day late; and never once was that glorious fortnight's holiday in the metropolis missed by the two bush toilers. To Caris the Christmas holiday was the maddest, merriest time, not clouded, but enhanced by the fact that 'Daddy' questioned, examined, and tested every item of her educational achievements for the year, and rejoiced, with exuberant joy, over her successes.

At the vacation of '78 they had borne her off in triumph to become the mistress of the beautiful little cottage home on the edge of the Bullarook Forest. And two happy and prosperous years had passed when we find Judge and Jim placidly smoking their pipes on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, 1880.

'Yes, Jim; I'm thinking of preaching on Sunday from that text in Habakkuk: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Only I've this awkward feeling, Jim. That text means that a man is to rejoice all the same if everything goes wrong. And I can't say I've ever gone through any trial like that. Ever since you and I got converted in the old log chapel at the Deep Lead everything seems to have prospered with us. We were pretty badly down on our luck just then. Here we are now, with a snug business, a good income, and the sweetest, dearest girl in the world looking after two old buffers like us, and seemingly as happy as a bird in doing it. Still, I think I'll have a talk to the boys on Sunday on "*Yet* I will rejoice in the Lord."'

At dusk that evening Judge, Jim, and Caris were sitting under the broad verandah of the cottage,

enjoying the mountain air, which seemed to come with a soft movement that could hardly be called wind, and with a peculiar freshness and comfort after the burning heat of the day. Caris had come out to call them to their late tea, but all three had lingered enjoying the coolness and watching the changing tints of the sky as the twilight faded.

As they were about to enter the cottage a most abject spectacle met their gaze. A man, with slow, tottering steps, tattered and dust-begrimed, and apparently in the last stage of exhaustion, approached the homestead.

'In mercy's name, what's this, Jim?'

Then, as the man approached, and in trembling words began to give some account of himself, Judge broke in: 'Oh, that'll do, mate; leave all the talk till afterwards. You look knocked clean out. Jim, just take this poor chap into your room, and let him have a bit of a wash, while Caris pours out a cup of tea.' Then, under his breath: 'Poor beggar! why, he looks almost dead; and just a young chap, too.'

A wash and a suit of Jim's clothes made a wonderful transformation in the wanderer; though his garb was grotesque enough, for he was of medium size, and the clothes of the gigantic Jim were anything but a fit.

The story which they learned later was not an uncommon one. Walter Hardinge had served a

law's course at Dublin University; and, with that confident but vague expectation so common among Englishmen, had come out to Australia, fully expecting to get immediate employment as a law clerk, and then to serve his articles, and easily secure a call to the colonial Bar.

But he had arrived in Melbourne during a period of depression. No work for which he had had any training was obtainable. He had tramped from town to town, until exposure, semi-starvation, and the heat of early summer brought on an illness which landed him in the Ballarat Hospital. When discharged, still ill and weak, he had resumed his search for work. A day or two previously he had received a letter promising him a position as timekeeper on a mine in the Bendigo district, and it was in attempting to reach there that he literally sank exhausted on Judge Millard's hospitable doorstep. A couple of meals and a long night's rest wrought a wonderful change in the poor fellow. He insisted on pressing on to Bendigo, being apparently haunted with the fear that he might lose the promised employment.

'You see, I've already been two or three days longer on the road than I had expected. You can't tell what it means to me to have the hope of work. I shall never forget your kindness. Yes, I know it's Christmas Day, but I must get along.'

'Well, then, young man,' said Judge; 'have your own way. But I'm going to have mine in another matter. Jim's going to drive you to Clunes this afternoon, so that you can catch the coach to Castlemaine. You'll be able to reach Bendigo from there by train to-morrow, and you're going to have a few pounds from me to help you on, which you're at liberty to pay back when it's convenient. Now, no talk about it. We Australians don't let a chap stick in a hole when he's trying to help himself out.'

In the afternoon both Judge and Jim drove in the gig over to Clunes, a distance of fifteen miles. It was an intensely hot day. A north-westerly wind, like the breath of a furnace, was sweeping over the landscape.

They had driven half the return journey at a leisurely pace, Jim having charge of the reins. As they mounted a slight eminence, Jim's eyes ranged round the western sky. Then a sharp cry broke from his lips.

'Judge, for God's sake, what's that?' His finger pointed to the horizon. Judge's face was as white as death. His trained eye took in the whole case in a moment.

'A fire! God help us. It's sweeping down into the Bullarook scrub. Give me the reins.'

Not another word he spoke. His breath came in gasps through his clenched teeth, and his eyes

gleamed like a madman's. His horse was a splendid creature—the finest in the country-side; and she flew over the road at a furious gallop.

The western sky was now blotted out with a dense wall of smoke, and the roar of the tornado of fire could be distinctly heard. At every few yards wild creatures of the forest, fleeing from the fiery death, would dash like lightning over the road—kangaroos, bandicoots, graceful rat kangaroos, and an occasional emu. Snakes, with that peculiar instinct of the reptile, wriggled rapidly across the road; and the grotesque, repulsive, 'stumpy-tailed' lizard, left his peculiar serrated tracks in the dust as he waddled off in frantic effort to find safety. On their right came on the awful fire fiend, sweeping with that north-west gale through the undergrowth and scrub of the forest faster than the fleetest horse could travel. On the left stretched almost to the horizon the smiling corn paddocks ready for the reapers, which, in an hour, would be reduced to a desert waste.

For those who have never witnessed the awful grandeur of an Australian forest fire no description can avail. The sense of limitless and cruel power wielded by a monster of death and destruction; the feeling of how pitiful and puny are man's best efforts matched against that awful force; the fierceness, rapidity, and ruthlessness of the raging, death-dealing blast,—these once realized can never

be forgotten. The loveliest landscape transformed in a moment to the likeness of Milton's pavement of hell; the results of years of toil reduced to smouldering ashes; and then the yet more agonizing tragedies, when those dearer than life are clasped in the Moloch arms of the fire fiend—such are the horrors of a bush fire.

Not a word did the men utter during that race with death. But each knew well the one agonized thought in the mind of the other. Not their beautiful home, or the timber-mill, which represented the product of their years of toil, but one thought—Caris.

As they dashed up to their homestead, the white foam flying from nostril and flank of their faithful beast, they only paused for a moment to slip the traces, so that, if the worst came, the poor creature might seek safety in flight. Then they rushed to the house. Caris was not there. As they paused for a moment, each looking into the other's ghastly face, the distant shout of the fire-fighters reached their ears. They both divined the truth in a moment.

Where would the brave girl be but helping their neighbours to fight the demon of destruction? A few moments brought them to the long line of blackened figures, who were making frantic efforts to 'burn back' a fire brake, so as to check the advance of the main conflagration. The women were

bearing water to the fighters to assuage the raging thirst produced by the heat, and also dragging forward fresh green boughs as others shrivelled to dryness in the fire-fighters' hands; and foremost among the women, with blackened face and hands, but shining eyes, was Caris. A great shout welcomed Judge and Jim—the two mightest bushmen in the district.

With redoubled energy the brave men threw themselves into the fight. A long crescent-shaped strip had been burned back, stretching well to the north of Millard's saw-mill and homestead till it touched the Clunes road, which, it was hoped, would check the flames in that direction. The other end of the fire brake extended well to the south-west, and strenuous efforts were being concentrated at this point to junction the cleared space with the main road on the south.

'Bravo, Judge; we've beaten it, I believe,' shouted the leader, a brawny farmer whose land ran up to the road on the east.

But the words were hardly uttered when a great cry came from the men on the extreme left.

'Heavens, boys, the wind has changed; the fire's coming from the south. Run, run to the road for your lives.'

Sweeping round the southern end of the 'brake,' and fed by a strip of dense, prickly undergrowth, the fire came straight with irresistible fury for the

mills, devouring all before it. No human being could stand for a moment in face of that intolerable heat.

In an instant Judge saw that his retreat to the road was cut off by a long tongue of fire that had shot along an acacia hedge.

'To the tank, Jim; your only chance,' he shouted, and snatching up Caris as if she had been a baby, Judge flew over the ground towards the great underground tank that supplied the mills with water.

To fling open the cover and force Caris through the opening was the work of a moment; and the next minute Jim and himself also sought safety in its depths. The water proved to be only about five feet deep, and although they had constantly to 'duck' beneath its surface to avoid the burning timber of the roof, they were in comparative safety.

An hour later, when they stood on the road before the smouldering ruins of their home, Judge's arm around the drenched, trembling figure of the girl, he remarked with a sad smile:

'I ought to be able to preach from that text to-morrow, after all, Jim. Oughtn't I?'

'ALTHOUGH . . . YET'

IT was a sad little congregation, though somewhat larger than usual, which gathered on the Christmas Sunday morning in the neat little Wesleyan chapel at Bullarook. The well-kept gravelled chapel yard had doubtless been the means of protecting the building from the torrent of flame which had surged around it on every side, The chapel stood like an oasis in a desert of blasted and ash-strewn country, with here and there a line of smouldering posts to indicate the boundary between what yesterday were waving paddocks of rich grain.

There was some speculation among the little groups of worshippers around the church door as to whether Millard, the local preacher appointed that morning, would be able to fulfil his engagement. Every one knew that the disastrous fire of the day before had left Judge homeless and ruined; and, amid their own losses, there was not one who did not feel the deepest pity for Millard, whose life and character had won the respect of every person in the community.

Punctually to time the preacher appeared, in company with the neighbour in whose house the homeless ones had found shelter.

As the service proceeded there was little in the preacher's tone or manner to indicate the severe trial through which he had passed. There was always in Judge's preaching a homeliness and absence of conventionality which was attractive. This morning there was, if possible, an even clearer ring of reality.

'Neighbours,' he said, in beginning his address. 'I had fixed on this text, "*Yet* I will rejoice in the Lord," some days ago. I doubted then whether I had ever had just the kind of personal experience which a man ought to have if he is to use consistently the words of this old prophet of God. None of us need have that kind of hesitation now. You have looked this morning on your blackened wheat-paddocks, smouldering barns and stables, and in some cases on what was your home, reduced to a pile of dust and ashes. It was in face of disasters, perhaps, even sadder and more far-reaching than these, that Habakkuk was able to say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation." The sincerity or otherwise with which we can echo these words to-day will be a practical test as to whether our religion is a working concern, or whether it is a mere theory that breaks down under practical test. An Infinite

Being must be infinitely loving, for an unloving being of infinite power is unthinkable. If, then, God is the All-loving Father, all that He does to us, or all that He permits, must be equally under the direction of His love. We cannot trace the reason of it all, and that isn't wonderful when we remember how little, in the very nature of the case, we can understand. We can generally believe that an earthly parent's love is as truly present in what he denies as in what he bestows. If this is so, surely we ought to have at least an equal confidence in God's love. To most of us the present has much of disappointment, and the future some grounds for anxiety; but if we can reach the standing-ground of this old Hebrew we shall still be able to sing:

One step I see before me; 'tis all I need to see,
The light of heaven more brightly shines when earth's illusions flee;
And sweetly through the darkness comes His loving 'Follow Me.'

Many a heart was warmed, and many a spirit cheered as Judge Millard's homely words of confident faith rang out.

But the preacher was destined to have his faith put to yet severer strain in the dark days to come.

It was a few weeks before his exact position resulting from the fire could be determined. Then it was found the amount of insurance would cover the wages due to the mills workmen, but would not meet more than a portion of the liabilities of the

business. The entire plant, together with large stacks of timber ready for the market, was entirely lost. So it came about that Judge was not only left penniless, but also burdened with a considerable amount of debt. For this latter he positively refused to take refuge in the Court of Insolvency, but determined to pay, in instalments, every penny of his liabilities.

Frank Millard earnestly considered the advisability of attempting to reconstruct his mill, and endeavour to once more fight his way to a prosperous position. In this endeavour he was assured of substantial help from many sympathetic friends. This hopeful project was, however, shattered by the establishment in the neighbourhood of an up-to-date mill, furnished with the most effective machinery, by a wealthy American syndicate. To attempt to compete with such a formidable rival would have been suicidal; and especially was it foreign to Judge's views of business integrity to incur such a risk on borrowed money. He, therefore, reluctantly said good-bye to the little settlement at Bullarook, and sought employment in the Clunes mines, renting a little cottage near the picturesque creek on the northern margin of the town. The little household was, however, hardly established in its new quarters, when some disquieting symptoms which had been manifest ever since that disastrous Christmas Day culminated in Judge being pros-

trated by a severe attack of rheumatic fever. By the doctor's unremitting attention, and the loving nursing of Jim and Caris, in a few weeks he made a fair recovery from the acute attack. But it left him almost as weak and helpless as a child. To one who had enjoyed all his life perfect health, and been accustomed to the constant exercise of his vast strength, such a condition of helplessness was distressing in the extreme. There could be no doubt also, that, despite his strong faith and dauntless courage, the fact that he was in a humiliating condition of debt, from which he could see no near prospect of extricating himself, told severely on his spirits, and retarded his recovery.

Unfortunately, also, the year 1881 saw a severe period of depression settle on the commercial and industrial life of Victoria. Jim had only been able to secure irregular employment for some time, and as soon as he could be spared from his friend's bedside announced his intention of seeking elsewhere more regular and remunerative work.

Judge continued in a variable and unsatisfactory condition of health. The doctor gravely hinted that the fever had resulted in some heart complications, though there were symptoms which greatly puzzled him. The neighbours shook their heads sadly, and said that Judge Millard would never again be the man he was.

Through those dark days Caris was a veritable angel of light. Whatever she might feel or fear, she surrounded the white-haired man whom she loved as her life with an atmosphere of hope and cheer. She had secured a few pupils in music and painting, and had besides an engagement to supervise the studies of the daughter of the principal mine manager in the higher branches of French literature. The income so derived kept the wolf from the door during the weeks and months of Judge's illness.

At intervals highly prized letters, full of hope and cheer, and containing small remittances, came from Jim Barber. He had found employment among the timber-mills of the Gippsland forests; but the almost incessant rains of a Gippsland winter involved much loss of time, and his earnings were small. No one ever knew what rigid self-denial was practised in order that month by month the little store should be forwarded to the loved ones in their distant home.

Early in the year a short letter had come from Walter Hardinge at Bendigo, full of grateful acknowledgements of the kindness the Millards had extended to him, and containing a P.O. order for the amount of the loan he had received. He stated he was doing pretty well in his employment, but beyond that he did not speak of himself. Several times Judge had mentioned the young fellow in a

casual way, but no further communication came from him, and the wayfarer's brief visit to them at that disastrous Christmas seemed to have faded out of their remembrance.

Among the members of the Clunes Church, with which Judge and Caris had immediately united, was a young man of twenty-seven, John Stockton, the son of a wealthy farmer, whose home was in the rich valley midway between Clunes and Glendaruel. From the time our friends took up their residence in Clunes, young Stockton had shown an undisguised admiration for Caris. It was noted that his Church attendance, which had previously been divided pretty equally between Clunes and Glendaruel, was now almost exclusively given to the larger church. In many unobtrusive ways he had shown a kindly interest during the days of Judge's illness, and an unmistakable friendship had grown up between the young people.

On Stockton's side it needed no exceptional cuteness to suspect that it was a much deeper feeling; while his kindness to Judge, to which her nature was very responsive, and the fine manly spirit and unobtrusive goodness of the young farmer, could not but appeal to Caris very strongly. She found the society of John Stockton very pleasant; and, without even thinking of analysing her own feelings in the matter, accepted his attitude of respectful devotion almost as a matter of course.

All this time the stress of their affairs was becoming more acute. Judge had been able to do a little work at intervals, but the heat of early summer prostrated him. A kind of low fever, associated, the doctor feared, with heart-weakness, brought him into what threatened to be a condition of chronic invalidism. Then two of Caris's best pupils were sent to England to finish their musical education, and the poor girl had to face the alternative of actual want or asking credit for the mere necessaries of life. Many a time had she and Judge strengthened the heart of each other by reviewing that great utterance of the Hebrew prophet: 'Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.'

'Caris, my girl,' Judge would say, 'I dare not cease to believe that between those two words, "although" and "yet," there is room for experiences even as anxious and burdensome as ours. I am afraid if it were not for my brave little girl I should lose faith sometimes; but I cannot look into your bonny eyes and doubt that the All-loving Father will yet drive all the shadows out of them and fill your life once more with joy and blessing.'

'I haven't any doubt about it all coming out right, father. I only want to see you strong and well again, and I shall be just as happy as we used to be in our little nest at Bullarook. Don't let yourself worry about me, daddy. "Sometime we'll understand."'

Christmas was once more approaching, and there would be no opportunity for many weeks for Caris to extend her small *clientèle* and so increase the income of their home. Things appeared to have reached the worst in their affairs, and Caris determined on a course she had long pondered. She would go to her minister and ask his advice in the sore straits in which she found herself. She was afraid to tell Judge, lest he should veto the step, and in any case she was sure it would greatly distress him. So that evening she set off along the creek on her mission.

A hundred yards from the door she met John Stockton, who turned and strolled along at her side, as though it were a matter of course.

'Caris,' he began, and there was a hesitation of manner in marked contrast to his usual directness, 'Caris, I've been for some time waiting an opportunity of speaking to you by yourself.'

And then, his voice gaining in fervour and passion as he proceeded, he poured into her ears the oft-told tale of an honest man's love.

John Stockton had powerful allies to his suit. Added to a manly, attractive person, there were mental and moral qualities of a high order. Their social, artistic, and religious tastes and convictions were in harmony. Respect, admiration, and gratitude seemed like handmaidens to lead the Goddess of Love into the citadel of the maiden's heart.

Then what would such a union mean to the one on whom all the filial devotion of her intense nature was centred? What would she not give to lift the cloud of trouble and difficulty from the brow of her 'daddy'? Then what young girl receiving for the first time the passionate declaration of a good man's love will not feel a thrill of pleasure, which, reinforced by such influences as those stated, may easily be mistaken for that irrevocable outflow of soul which alone deserves the sacred title of 'love'?

Caris was an unspoilt child of Nature—absolutely untouched by the frivolities and artificialities which constitute so much of the life of many modern girls. She had been trained to be absolutely honest with herself and others. It was into such an unsullied soul that the interpreting light of love's declaration was thrown, revealing to Caris, not only the heart of John Stockton, but also revealing, as under a vivid searchlight, her own.

In that supreme moment Caris passed from a girlhood, free from all morbid introspection, to a responsible, self-knowing womanhood.

John Stockton had taken her hand.

'Caris, I have shown you all my heart. What shall your answer be?'

SUNSHINE AT LAST

WE have said that John Stockton's fervent declaration of love served to reveal to Caris Millard not only the heart of the young farmer, but her own. There had been a kind of tacit acceptance of John's manifest regard, and a pleasing, unanalysed sense of responsiveness that is the characteristic of most girls under similar circumstances, if their minds are unspoiled by morbid imaginings. But the words of young Stockton had something of the effect which an electric current has upon certain chemicals in solution. It separated and precipitated the elements of her spiritual consciousness into definite and tangible proportions.

'Oh, John; I cannot—I dare not.' The girl was sobbing piteously.

'You will not understand, I fear, and you will think hardly of me. Perhaps you will think me mean and false. Until this moment I really imagined that I—I thought I cared. But, oh, John, I haven't, I never can have, the love that you deserve, that you have a right to expect. I see it

all now. You won't ask me to say more, will you?'

John Stockton looked into the tear-wet face with a gaze in which deep affection, respect, and unspeakable sadness were blended.

He could not have dreamed of uttering a word of reproach; he loved her too purely and unselfishly for that. And he knew her too well to think for a moment that she had knowingly misled him. Neither did it occur to him to remonstrate or plead. He was the soul of sincerity and straightforwardness, and believed that the answer of Caris was irrevocable. His face was very white; but beyond that he gave no indication that his dream of happiness was shattered for ever.

'Caris, my heart is very sore. But I am not selfish nor foolish enough to blame you because I have not been able to win your love. You will still let me be your friend, and I pray the Divine Master, whom we both try to serve, to bless you, and make your life full of happiness.'

They had reached the post-office, and with a quiet adieu he left her. Caris went to the delivery window before continuing her walk to the parsonage. She hardly expected any letters, but the clerk handed her one addressed in Jim Barber's well-known handwriting. It was a brief, breezy epistle full of hope and cheer, and contained a larger

remittance than the loyal-hearted Jim had previously been able to send. The summer had brought more continuous and remunerative employment, and his first thought had been for those at home.

Caris flew back to their cottage with very mingled feelings. Joy at the unexpected deliverance from immediate distress, and a hearty sharing of Judge's affectionate gratitude to his lifelong friend, were mingled with her genuine sorrow for the pain she had been compelled to give to John Stockton, and the certainty that her refusal would be a sad disappointment to her 'daddy.'

Caris leaned her head on his shoulder and told all her story.

'Oh, daddy, what could I do? He is so true and noble, I could not dare to make the poor, meagre return I am capable of for a love like his. But it is so hard for you, daddy. Can you still believe in me, and believe that I am trying to do the thing that is right?'

'Caris, dear, I like young Stockton, and I say freely I had hoped that he might win you, and make you very happy. But, God forbid, child, that I should wish you to decide this matter on reasons lower than the highest. You have done right. No other course would be worthy of you. I think, as you said the other day, "Some time we'll understand."'

Things went on in their usual groove for a few weeks, and Saturday, the Christmas Eve of 1881, dawned.

There always seemed a momentousness about Christmas Eve to Caris. Was it a lingering trace of rural superstition, or is there really, for some persons, a special significance in certain periods, designed by an all-knowing and all-loving Providence? In spite of present poverty and grave anxiety concerning the future, the young girl's heart seemed to feel a strange elation, and there was an unwonted joyousness, even for her, in the carol which trilled on her lips all day.

It had been a beautiful day, followed by one of those perfect evenings which make even the Australian summer climate one of the best in the world. The evening train had been in for some time, but the light was still strong, when Judge, sitting under the verandah which commanded a view of the pathway across the hill from the station, remarked:

'There's some one who seems to be a stranger coming down the path, Caris. Looks as if he's heading this way.'

What was it made Caris turn pale, and, without replying, hurry away to her little kitchen? If she had not fully known the secret of her own heart before, she was compelled to know and acknowledge it to herself now.

The stranger had reached the door.

'Why, Mr. Millard, you don't know me. No wonder. It was a poor, hopeless wreck that drifted into the haven of your kindness this day twelve-month. But what on earth has happened? You look only the ghost of the kindly giant that lifted me up out of my wretchedness then. I know you got burned out, but surely you've been ill? And I didn't know; I never heard.'

Judge's greeting to Walter Hardinge was full of heartiness; and later around the tea-table the story of the young man's experiences was soon told. Soon after his appointment as timekeeper of the 'Nugget' Mine, Bendigo, the legal manager had died. The Directors had already seen evidences of the business tact and legal knowledge of their young timekeeper. Some delicate negotiations for the amalgamation of three leading companies on the line of lode gave opportunity for these qualities to be called into more prominent notice, with the result that in a few weeks Walter Hardinge found himself legal manager of the 'Great United,' the wealthiest mining corporation on the deep lead. He had treasured up all the year the eager expectation of visiting his benefactors of a year ago on the day, and at the identical hour, when, as a homeless and starving tramp, he had found refuge and help in their hospitable home.

Inwoven with the press and stir of his strenuous life during the year was a dream that he dreaded to have dissipated; and now, as he sat opposite the face and form that had never been absent from his dream, he rated himself for his presumption and folly in imagining that this glorious girl could have bestowed a second thought on the ragged wanderer who for a few hours had been the beneficiary of her mercy.

'We are decorating the church this evening, father. I am afraid I must leave you now. I promised the girls I would not be later than half-past eight. Your mining and bush yarns will keep Mr. Hardinge fully engaged, I have no doubt.'

But Hardinge remembered that it was imperative for him to go along to his hotel to make final arrangements about his stay over the holidays. So it was perfectly natural that the young people should undertake their half-mile walk in company.

It is not necessary o inquire too closely as to the details of that walk on the hills overlooking the picturesque mining town. But the young ladies of the Clunes Church had to complete their decorations without the deft fingers of Caris; and when the two again entered the cottage door Judge saw a light in the eyes of his darling he had never seen before.

'Oh, daddy, daddy,' she cried, with her arms around his neck; 'didn't we say "some time we'll understand"?'

The grip that Judge Millard gave to the hand of Walter Hardinge had almost its old vice-like quality, but no words came, and the white-haired man sat back in his chair with two big tears in his great black eyes.

Later on, and far into the night, the two men talked. Every detail of that story of twenty-one years ago the older man honestly put before his foster-child's lover.

'And now, Walter, my boy, as my little girl came like Heaven's own Christmas gift into my poor blighted life so long ago, I suppose I must not grieve if God chooses to send you to take back His treasure from me now.'

'Not that, sir, not that, I hope. Rather, will you not let me so come into your life that you may feel that you have your dear girl always; and that when, a year ago, you carried out the teaching of the Master's "Inasmuch," you were adding another to those who love you with a love that I hope will rank even next to that of Caris and Jim.'

Judge invited Walter to be with them for their early breakfast on Christmas Day.

'Surely,' said Judge, as they sat at the breakfast-table, 'we can use my text of a year ago this morning: "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation." What will dear old Jim say about all this? I miss him dreadfully. It's the first Christmas for twenty-four years that

Jim and I haven't had our feet under the same table. Poor old Jim! I wish he were here.'

'Well, you needn't wish very long, old chap. Here I am, as sure as fate. What! did you think I'd be away from you at Christmas, if I'd to walk half across Australia?'

It was Jim.

And what a greeting it was! The arms of Caris were around the neck of the rugged bushman; and a king might have envied the kiss of welcome he received on his bearded cheek; while the grip of the hand from the man for whom he would have laid down his life blotted out the remembrance of months of toil, loneliness, and privation. These men were nature's noblemen, untainted by a particle of the world's sordidness.

It did not take long for Jim to become fully acquainted with the new and happy developments that had arisen; and he rejoiced with Walter and Caris in their happiness with a simple-hearted, unselfish joy.

'And now, Caris, and the rest of you, I don't see why you should have all the surprises to yourselves,' said Jim, when things had settled down to something like a normal condition; 'I've got something here to show you.'

And Jim began, with exasperating deliberateness, to unstrap his swag. Blankets, spare clothes, tucker-bag, bachelor's mending kit, and the quaint

olla podrida which make up a bushman's swag, were piled on a chair with great care. At last Jim came to a newspaper.

'Now, this here's a *Weekly Times* I got in the train coming up. Listen to this.'

And he read the following advertisement and paragraph:—

'LEGAL NOTICES.

'The undersigned will be glad of any information as to the whereabouts of one Gladys Cronin, daughter of Thomas Cronin, believed to have been adopted about twenty years ago by a sawyer near Creswick, Victoria. On proof of identity of the said Gladys Cronin, or her legal representatives, the undersigned will be able to make communications to her, or them, to their very great advantage.

'SUMMERS & SUMMERS,
'Solicitors,
'Brisbane, Queensland.'

A paragraph on the same page read:

'A ROMANTIC STORY.

'Referring to an advertisement that appears in our columns to-day, a representative of our office has gleaned the following facts. Something over twenty years ago the wife of a drover named Thomas Cronin disappeared mysteriously from her home in one of the central districts of Victoria, leaving an infant daughter six months old. The child was adopted by a working man whose name

we have been unable to learn. Nothing was heard of the child's mother until recently, when it was found that her death was registered in an inland town in New South Wales. Cronin, who was in a distant part of Victoria when his wife disappeared, supposed she had taken her child with her, and he never revisited his former home. Later on he found his way to Queensland and took up land on the Darling Downs. Here, living almost the life of a hermit, he amassed considerable wealth. No one seems to have known anything of his antecedents until a few weeks ago, when he died suddenly of apoplexy. It was then found that he had left among his documents a few notes from which the above facts have been gleaned. He also left a will, leaving his entire estate, which is variously estimated to be worth from £100,000 to £200,000, to his daughter or her heirs; or, if she is not living, to various charities named in the will. Extensive inquiries have been made already for the child Gladys, who, if living, would be now a woman, but so far without result.'

Caris, as we must still call her for the present, looked into Judge's face in perplexity and something like alarm. Though she had been told the facts of her infancy, she had never been told her father's name; and Judge's pet name of Carissima she had always regarded as her real name.

'Yes, my pet, it is true. You are evidently a rich woman. The legal proofs of your identity as Gladys Cronin are in old Smithson the lawyer's office in Creswick.'

It was a very happy group that joined in the worship of the Clunes Church on that Christmas Sunday morning. And each could realize that to those who love God, though weeping may endure for a night, and sometimes a long night, joy comes in the morning.

A year later, on Christmas Day, there was a very joyous wedding in the little chapel at Bullarook; for it was Caris's whim that she would not be married except at Christmas, nor anywhere else than in the church of her old forest nest.

One of the men most loved and trusted in all the district is John Stockton. People wonder why the quiet, prosperous man, who has a bright smile and a kind word for every one, has never married. If any one makes a humorous remark about his bachelor ways, he only laughs and says he is not a marrying man. Two or three people know why—and now the reader knows.

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